THE HALF OF IT

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BLACK:

1 ANIMATION SEQUENCE (NOTE: STILL TRYING STUFF!) 1

"Love is simply the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole." - Plato, The Symposium

A BLANK SHEET OF PARCHMENT.

ELLIE (V.O.)
The Ancient Greeks believed humans once had four arms, four legs, and a single head made of two faces.

GRAVEL emerges from the center of the page and “crushes” into BLACK POWDER which forms the base for CHARCOAL STROKES. Animated STROKES illustrate a TWIN-BEING.

ELLIE (V.O.)
We were happy. Complete.

A CHARCOAL HEART encircles the twin-being. Both faces smile.

ELLIE (V.O.)
So complete that the gods - fearing our wholeness would quell our need for worship - cleaved us in two...

The page TEARS in half; the Twin-Being is SPLIT!

ELLIE (V.O.)
...leaving our split-selves to wander the earth in misery, forever longing...

ZOOM IN on one of the halves as it wanders the earth CRYING. The strokes of its body morph into a lonely CAVE PAINTING FIGURE, also crying.

ELLIE (V.O.)
...longing...

Morph into the “Mona Lisa”...crying. “The Scream”... crying.

ELLIE (V.O.)
...longing...

Morph into a classic black and white movie with a closeup of an actress, you guessed it: crying.

1 CONTINUED: 1

ELLIE (V.O.)
...for the other half of our soul.

From cave paintings to Ingrid Bergman. So many tears.

ELLIE (V.O.)
It is said that when one half finds its other...

Pull out to reveal: the reverse shot to that classic movie! Lover's eyes meet! Each reverts back to their split-being.

ELLIE (V.O.)
...there is an unspoken understanding, a unity - and each would know no greater joy than this.

A classic KISS. Music SWELLS as the charcoal halves converge into a BIG ANIMATED CHARCOAL HEART...

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

2 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH SCHOOL - LOCKERS - MORNING 2

A CRAPPY GRAFFITI HEART on a high school wall.

Two seniors joined as one by the lips.

ELLIE (V.O.)
Of course, the Ancient Greeks never went to high school.

BELL RINGS. The seniors break apart like it was nothing.

SENIOR GUY
Good hangout.

SENIOR GIRL
Whatever.

Both pull out phones, part ways.

ELLIE (V.O.)
Or they'd realize...

Sound of the MORNING BELL dissolves into...

3 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - NEXT DAY 3

...the BLAST of a TRAIN WHISTLE... growing LOUDER...

CLOSE ON the FACE OF A GIRL, 17, pressed against a LAPTOP KEYBOARD, her body curled around a copy of PLATO'S SYMPOSIUM, fast asleep inside a frosted TICKET BOOTH. She jerks awake.

ELLIE
Crap.

This is ELLIE CHU.

She bolts out of the booth.

On her computer screen we see (and hear in voiceover):

ELLIE (V.O.)
We don't need the gods to mess things up for us.

A PASSING TRAIN wipes frame...

4 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - MOMENTS LATER 4

...leaving Ellie on the LEFT SIDE of the platform, her back to us, holding a signal light.

On the right, SUPER: "THE HALF OF IT"

The station is otherwise empty.

5 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - MORNING 5

SERIES OF CLOSEUP SHALLOW-FOCUS SHOTS:

- ELLIE'S HEAD POPS OUT OF A SWEATER

ELLIE (V.O.)
If you ask me...

- TWO FROZEN SWANSON CHICKEN PIES ON THE COUNTER

ELLIE (V.O.)
...people spend far too much time looking for someone to complete them.

A fork jabs holes into the tops of the pies.

5 CONTINUED: 5

ELLIE (V.O.)
How many people find perfect love?

- LONE SOCK UNDER A BENCH. FINGERS REACH IN VAIN.

ELLIE (V.O.)
Or if they do... make it last?

Angle on half of Ellie coming out from under the bench, one sock on, one bare foot. Drift over to a BURSTING BAG OF DIRTY LAUNDRY... Drift further to an ALTAR for HER DEAD MOTHER. We linger on a PHOTO OF HER MOTHER: young, laughing, striking the same pose as the STATUE of BOB'S BIG BOY just behind her.

ELLIE (V.O.)
More evidence of Camus' theory that life is irrational and meaningless.

- A PRINTER spits out a page on which is written:

"...Camus' theory that life is irrational and meaningless."

A HAND grabs the page, signing "Trig Carson, AP English".

CUT to ANOTHER PAPER. On its last page:

"We don't need the gods to mess things up for us."

The hand signs - in new penmanship - "Todd Ball, English"

Papers are tossed onto a stack.

- ON COVERS GENTLY BEING PULLED OVER EDWIN CHU, 50's, snoring in a LA-Z-BOY.

ELLIE (V.O.)
And that, my friends, is some A+ love philosophy right there.

In the deep background, Ellie tiptoes out.

- CHECKS OFF A LIST BY THE DOOR: "Long underwear" (check) "Defrost pies" (check) "Laundry" (does NOT check) "Stay Away From Boys" (check) "Have Good Day" (check)

ELLIE (V.O.)
Or A-, if Mrs. G is in a bad mood.

The door slams behind her.

CUE OPENING CREDITS

6 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - VIADUCT ROAD - SAME MORNING 6

A dilapidated sign announces: “It’s Happening In SQUAHAMISH!”

The sign rusts in an empty field.

Ellie speeds past on her bike toward a viaduct.

7 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN/CATHOLIC CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER 7

The road continues past a small CATHOLIC CHURCH. Outside, a Man with a SIGN: “JESUS IS COMING. ARE YOU READY?”

FATHER SHANLEY, 90’s, stands in the doorway bellowing:

FATHER SHANLEY
“Outside are the dogs the sorcerers
the immoral persons and everyone
WHO LOVES AND PRACTICES LYING!”

Ellie flies by.

8 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN/CARSON GRAVEL SIGN - MOMENTS LATER 8

A giant granite sign heralds “CARSON GRAVEL. We’re more than just gravel!”

Ellie huffs past it up a hill and around the bend.

9 EXT. SQUAHAMISH ROAD INTO TOWN - CONTINUOUS 9

A TRUCK rips by, a group of OBNOXIOUS TEEN BOYS heckle from the pick-up truck:

OBNOXIOUS TEENS
ELLIE CHUUU! Chugga-chugga-chugga- *
chugga, Chugga chugga... CHU CHU!

They tear off, laughing.

Ellie presses on toward the peak...

...and coasts down the other side.

We lift up to see this former mining town in its faded glory.

A SWELL OF OFF-KEY SINGING from a STUDENT CHOIR.

10 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - MUSIC ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 10

A handsome, pained DEACON JAY FLORES brings it to a close.

DEACON FLORES
Fantastic. The angels weep with joy.

Hidden in the corner: Ellie at a keyboard, adjacent to the BAND. She sneaks a term paper into the folds of a songbook, sends it down the reed section.

On Ellie's phone: "HushMo: Todd B. sent you $20."

DEACON FLORES (CONT'D)
Few announcements. Once again: wall tubas have to be checked out before use. These are delicate instruments with sticky valves...

Songbooks travel the room. HushMo notifications roll in.

As the Deacon waxes on, we see kids on their phones.

One SHY BOY OBOIST types out: "Wanna go to OKTOBER FLING?"...

... which appears on a TROMBONIST'S SCREEN. She forwards...

...to three of her friends who roll eyes...

...one posts a SCREENSHOT with caption "#nerdalert".

Snickers throughout the room.

DEACON FLORES (CONT'D)
Is there a problem?

WHOLE CLASS (EN MASSE)
No, Deacon Flores.

DEACON FLORES
(beat) As I was saying, please keep your reeds lubricated. Next up, Winter Talent Show. Mandatory for all seniors, last chance to strut your stuff, again, mandatorily...

Shy Boy Oboist melts into his seat, beet-red.

Ellie's eyes travel past him into the CHOIR, where a group of rich kids (QUADDIES) buzz around a TALL HANDSOME BOY, 17. This is TRIG CARSON. Gravel money.

10 CONTINUED: 10

Trig drapes his arm around A GIRL, 17, glued to her songbook... which hides her phone. THIS IS ASTER FLORES.

DEACON FLORES (CONT'D)
Let's all turn to page 49...

He lifts his baton. Aster reluctantly shuts her book, prepares to sing.

ELLIE (V.O.)
In case you haven't guessed, this is not a love story.

Ellie's eyes stay on Aster. Aster's voice rings out pure...

ELLIE (V.O.)
Or not one where anyone gets what they want.

...and travels out the window, where we hear...

COACH (O.S.)
ARE YOU MEN, OR ARE YOU LOSERS?

11 EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - TRACK - SAME TIME 11

...a PACK OF FOOTBALL PLAYERS stampede in a CLOUD OF DUST. One BROAD-SHOULDERED BOY lags behind, staring at the window, transfixed. This is PAUL MUNSKY, 17.

COACH (O.S.)
MUNSKY!

He tosses a last glance over his shoulder... starts running.

12 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - HALLWAY - DAY 12

Your basic school hallway jungle between bells. The populars, the not-so-populars... high-fives, side-eye, dismissals.

MRS. G. (O.S.)
Notice the lack of fire and brimstone in No Exit. No torture devices necessary...

Unnoticed in the swirl of activity is Ellie, staring at a poster labeled "SENIOR RECITAL SIGN-UPS - MANDATORY."

MRS. G. (O.S.) (CONT'D)
We are the source of our own hell.

12 CONTINUED: 12

She signs her name resignedly - the only solo on the sheet.

13 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - MRS. G'S CLASSROOM - DAY 13

In chalk on A BLACKBOARD:

"Hell is other people. -- John-Paul Sartre, NO EXIT."

BELL RINGS.

MRS. GESELSCHAP, 60's, sinks back into her chair.

MRS. G.
500 words on Sartre's use of thwarted desire. Monday.

Students stream out, Ellie the last to leave.

MRS. G. (CONT'D)
Six different takes on Plato. Impressive.

ELLIE
(innocent) Just the one.

MRS. G.
Sure, sure, that's what I tell the bartender.

Ellie laughs. Pulls out a stack of books to return.

ELLIE
How come you've never turned me in?

MRS. G.
And have to read the actual essays they'd write? (makes face)

Mrs. G slides over a new stack of books. On top: an APPLICATION FOR GRINNELL COLLEGE.

ELLIE
You know I'm going to "E-Dub."

MRS. G.
Damn shame.

ELLIE
Damn "full-ride." I can live at home. Plus, I get to stay in lovely Squahamish.

13 CONTINUED: 13

MRS. G.
Hell-quamish.

ELLIE
It's not that bad.

Mrs. G shoots her a look.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
It's not that good either. But it's what's happening.

MRS. G.
I spent four of the best years of my life at Grinnell.

ELLIE
And look at you, back home in *Hell*-quamish.

MRS. G.
You're right. Stay away from the liberal arts.

Ellie laughs and stuffs the application in her bookbag.

ELLIE
Try not to get fired over the weekend.

MRS. G.
Are you kidding? Everyone in this town fears God. You know who God fears? (smug) Teacher's Union.

Ellie shakes her head fondly, and is gone.

14 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD OUT OF TOWN - AFTERNOON 14

Ellie pedals home from school.

That SAME TRUCK from morning hurtles by.

OBNOXIOUS TEEN BOYS
Chugga-chugga-chugga, Chugga-chugga-chugga... CHU CHUUUUU!

Ellie keeps pedaling.

Moments later.

14 CONTINUED: 14

PAUL (O.S.)
Hey!

Ellie pedals faster.

PAUL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Hey!!

FASTER.

PAUL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
HEY!!! HOLD UP!

A BREATHLESS PAUL appears in frame. He grabs onto Ellie's saddlebag, bringing her down.

ELLIE
What is wrong with you??

PAUL
Sorry I-

He dry-heaves from exertion. Still coughing, he digs into his KNAPSACK... pulls out a bratwurst. Stuffs it into his mouth and keeps rummaging.

Ellie sighs. She knows what this is.

ELLIE
$10 for 3 pages. $20, 3 to 10. Not in the over-10 page biz-

PAUL
It's not- I'm not tryna to cheat-

ELLIE
Nobody is. Which class is it for?

PAUL
It's not- It's uh...

He pulls out an ENVELOPE and offers it to her.

ELLIE
What's this?

PAUL
A letter.

ELLIE
Who writes letters these days?

14 CONTINUED: (2) 14

PAUL
I thought it'd seem romantic? Also she doesn't have Facebook. Maybe you could make me sound smart?

ELLIE
Who's "she"?

She opens it, curious...

INSERT: THE LETTER. "Dear Aster Flores..."

She shoves it back.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
I can't help you.

PAUL
I just need a few words. Good ones.

ELLIE
I'm not writing to Aster Fl- to some girl. It'd be wrong. A letter is personal. It's supposed to be authentic.

PAUL
That would be *awesome*!

ELLIE
No, I can't be *you* being authent-

Gives up. Mounts her bike.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Get a thesaurus. Use spell-check. Good luck, Romeo.

Pedals off.

PAUL
I can pay more for authentic!

She's gone.

He hurls his KNAPSACK to the ground. Takes a resigned bite of his bratwurst.

15 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - NIGHT 15

Close on a TV playing the last scene of CASABLANCA.

15 CONTINUED: 15

Reverse on Ellie and Edwin Chu, in twin La-Z-Boy recliners, eating pot pies. Ellie keeps one eye on the screen, the other on a laptop where she writes three papers at once.

The lights flicker.

ELLIE (IN MANDARIN)
Did you call the power company?

EDWIN (IN MANDARIN)
They don't understand my accent.

ELLIE
Did you try?

EDWIN
Sssshh. Best part.

HUMPHREY BOGART (ON TV)
I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

EDWIN (CONT'D)
I think this is beginning of beautiful friendship.

Edwin shoots his daughter a sheepish look. She sighs, affectionate.

ELLIE
I'll call Monday.

Father and daughter take synchronized bites of pie.

16 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - NIGHT 16

The station deserted save for a lone Ellie - in the engineer booth - pounding away on her keyboard.

ON BLACK:

“The god of love lives in a state of need. -- Plato. Again.”

17 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - MORNING 17

Ellie bikes to school, phone pressed to ear.

CUSTOMER SERVICE (OVER PHONE)
Inland Power and Light...

ELLIE (INTO PHONE)
I’m calling for account 467838...

17 CONTINUED: 17

CUSTOMER SERVICE (OVER PHONE)
Please hold...

Hold music plays.

18 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - SCHOOL CORRIDOR - MORNING 18

Ellie skirts through the fray, still on phone.

ELLIE (INTO PHONE)
Account 46D838. *

CUSTOMER SERVICE (OVER PHONE)
Please re-enter your selection.

She spies PAUL out of the corner of her eye LOOKING TO GET HER ATTENTION. She dodges down an arterial hallway...

ELLIE (INTO PHONE)
Bill... Extension.

HOLD MUSIC continues.

19 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - MUSIC ROOM - NOON 19

Ellie alone in the music room, playing a dirge-like solo to accompany the HOLD MUSIC.

20 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - HALLWAYS - AFTERNOON 20

A weary Ellie braves the afternoon hallway crowd, phone still pressed to ear. Spins to avoid PAUL on the far end of the hallway with his teammates...

... SLAMMING right into TRIG AND HIS QUADDIES, who walk through her, oblivious. Books, papers, bag go flying.

She scrambles to gather her things.

ASTER
These hallways are murder.

Aster has stooped down. To help.

ASTER (CONT'D)
It's a whole natural selection situation waiting to play out.

Ellie is struck dumb. *Say something, say something...*

20 CONTINUED: 20

ELLIE
I'm Ellie Chu.

ASTER
(amused) Yes, I know. You've only been playing my dad's services every Sunday for like four years. You're his favorite heathen. He can't handle mediocre accompanists - even if they are saved.

They stand. Aster glances at the book she picked up.

ASTER (CONT'D)
"Remains of the Day". Loved it. All that barely repressed longing.

She pops it on top of Ellie's stack... and is gone.

ELLIE
(groaning) "I'm Ellie Chu?"

CUSTOMER SERVICE (OVER PHONE)
Yes I know. Your bill is 3 months overdue, Mrs. Chu. If we don't get a minimum payment of $50, your power will terminate tomorrow.

Ellie stands alone in the hallway, as the LAST BELL RINGS, staring into nothingness. Suddenly, at the end of the hall:

PAUL appears, searching... finds her! *Is she gonna run again?*

On a desperate Ellie, considering. Then:

ELLIE
$50. One letter. After that you're on your own.

PAUL
YES!

He holds up his hand for a high five. She walks away.

21 OMITTED 21

22 INT. SQUAHAMISH CATHOLIC CHURCH - CHAPEL - AFTERNOON 22

Ellie reads Paul's letter, slouched in the last pew of the Chapel. Paul sits on another pew across the aisle.

22 CONTINUED: 22

ELLIE
"Dear Aster, I think your really beautiful. But even if you were ugly, I'd want to know you. Cuz you are smart and nice too. It's hard to find all those things in one girl. But even if you were only two of those things, I'd be into it. But your like all three. Just to be clear."

She looks up at Paul: *What is this?*

PAUL
She's like - all three.

ELLIE
Thanks for clarifying.

She goes back to the letter.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
"About me. I am kind of cute. Some people think I'm the cutest one in my family! Those people being my grandma. Who's dead now. Never mind about my dead grandma. All I am trying to say is that I like fries. I like dipping them in my milkshake. Is that weird? It's actually really tasty! Would you like to try that with me some time? Let me know. I work part time and I have a truck! Let me know. Whenever. Thanks, Paul Munsky. (Second-string tight end. Football.)"

Beat.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
So what you're trying to say is--

PAUL
I'm in love with her.

ELLIE
Have you ever spoken to her?

PAUL
I'm not good with words.

22 CONTINUED: (2) 22

ELLIE
But you *know* you "*love*" her.

PAUL
I *know* I think about her when I wake up, and when I'm doing sprints, and when I'm eating my mom's brats, and when I'm saying my prayers and when I'm--

ELLIE
That just means you're stubborn. Not that you're in love.

PAUL
No, it's love. Love makes you screwy. Don't you get screwy?

ELLIE
No.

She goes back to the letter, skimming it.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
(to self) This whole section needs - that fry thing does sound good - (crossing out) dangling modifier...

Paul takes her in.

PAUL
Oh. I get it.

ELLIE
Get what?

PAUL
You've never been in love.

Ellie looks at him. Shoves the letter into his ribs.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Ow!

ELLIE
You want a letter about love? I'll write you a letter about love.

She grabs her bag.

22 CONTINUED: (3) 22

PAUL
One that'll make her fall in love with me. Not storm off in a huff. Like you're doing right now....!

She's gone.

23 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - NIGHT 23

ONSCREEN: "Wings of Desire" by Wim Wenders.

Edwin watches, rapt. Ellie handwrites furiously. She looks up, momentarily stumped. Notices the screen.

ELLIE (IN MANDARIN)
This isn't even American. How are you going to learn English?

EDWIN (IN MANDARIN)
Sssh. Best part.

WOMAN (ON TV, IN FRENCH)
Longing for a wave of love that would stir in me. That's what makes me clumsy.

EDWIN (CONT'D)
Longing for a wave of love that would stir in me. That's what makes me clumsy. *

Ellie considers this. Writes "Longing for a wave of love..."

24 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - HALLWAY - MORNING 24

An exhausted Ellie shoves a letter toward Paul.

PAUL
You sealed it? (off Ellie's glare)
I'm sure it's good.

Ellie leaves.

PAUL (CONT'D)
(calling after her) Thank you.

ELLIE
HushMo me. *

25 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD OUT OF TOWN - LATER THAT AFTERNOON 25

Ellie bikes home.

25 CONTINUED: 25

PAUL (O.S.)
Hey!

Not this guy again. Ellie pedals faster.

Paul appears in the background, flushed from exertion.

PAUL (CONT'D)
She wrote back!

Ellie jerks to a stop.

INSERT: ASTER'S RESPONSE:

ASTER (V.O.)
"I like Wim Wenders too. Wouldn'a plagiarized him though."

Off Ellie's astonished reaction. *Who* is *this girl?*

PAUL
Who's Wim Wenders? And why'd you cheat off him?!

ELLIE
I didn't cheat off him-

PAUL
I looked up "plagiarize"-!

ELLIE
I kinda cheated off him-

PAUL
I PAID you-!

ELLIE
But this is good!

PAUL
How?

Yeah, how?

ELLIE
It's like... a game. She's challenging us. In a good way.

PAUL
So we're still in... the game...

25 CONTINUED: (2) 25

ELLIE
Yup. Mmhmm. We are. So. Yay.

She offers a weak fist bump. Which misses. She pedals off.

PAUL
So... HushMo you? *

But Ellie's already speeding down the hill.

ELLIE
Game on, Aster Flores. Game. On.

A PIANO SOLO commences...

ELLIE (V.O.)
"Dear Aster. Okay. You got me."

26 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - DAY - LATER 26

Ellie is a DISTANT SPECK, biking towards CAMERA.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"I sometimes hide behind other people's words."

27 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - ANOTHER NIGHT 27

Ellie and Edwin in La-Z-Boys watch another classic movie.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"For one thing, those people are published. For another..."

Father and daughter each toss back a YAKULT.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"...I know nothing about love."

28 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ANOTHER DAY 28

A PASSING TRAIN WIPES THE SCREEN...

ELLIE (V.O.)
"I'm 17. I've lived in Squahamish my whole life."

...leaving ELLIE and her SIGNAL LIGHT on the platform alone.

29 INT. SQUAHAMISH CATHOLIC CHURCH - CHAPEL - ANOTHER AFTERNOON 29

Ellie and Paul argue from separate pews.

PAUL
This is such a downer!

ELLIE
It's not a downer!

PAUL
Major downer! Ask her to hang out!

ELLIE
(a real question)
What exactly is... "hanging out"?

PAUL
You know. *Hanging out.*

ELLIE
But like what do you *do?*--

A couple guys from the team ENTER. Paul and Ellie separate, pretend not to know each other.

FOOTBALL DUDE
Munsky! S'up?

PAUL
Confession.

FOOTBALL DUDE
Wanna go to Joey's and hang out?

PAUL
Yup.

They leave Ellie behind.

30 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - ANOTHER EARLY MORNING 30

Ellie scrunched in her ticket booth, writing.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"I hang out with my friends."

31 EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - TRACK - ANOTHER EARLY MORNING 31

The TEAM runs around the track....

ELLIE (V.O.)
"I keep my head down."

...revealing Paul doubled over, breathless.

32 EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE/EXT. ELLIE'S ATTIC WINDOW - ANOTHER NIGHT 32

Paul empties the garbage.

Angle on ELLIE from her ATTIC BEDROOM watching him.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"I'm a simple... guy. Which is to say..."

33 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - DAY (SAME AS SCENE 26) 33

Ellie is now almost at the CAMERA.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"If I knew what love was, I would quote myself."

Ellie rides past.

34 EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - PARKING LOT/TRIG'S TRUCK - NOON - ANOTHER DAY 34

Close on Aster's face absorbing this last line. Around her: the faded sounds of teens grandstanding.

The PIANO SOLO ends.

35 INT. SQUAHAMISH CATHOLIC CHURCH - CHAPEL - ANOTHER AFTERNOON 35

Ellie bent over the piano for a quiet moment, just breathing.

PAUL (O.S.)
Psssst.

Her head jerks around.

35 CONTINUED: 35

PAUL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
In here!

She stares at THE CONFESSION BOOTH.

36 INT. SQUAHAMISH CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONFESSION BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER 36

Ellie slides into one side of the booth; Paul's in the other. Father Shanley in booth between them, softly snoring.

ELLIE
Isn't this sacrilegious?

PAUL
I used to hide here when my brothers played SlapFight.

He reaches through the curtain with a letter.

PAUL (CONT'D)
She wrote back.

Ellie's arm reaches for it from the other side.

ASTER (V.O.)
"Dear Paul..."

37 INT. SQUAHAMISH - CATHOLIC CHURCH - CHAPEL - MORNING 37

Weekly mass through Aster's eyes. Dream-like and mundane. The sounds of her father's homily in the background.

ASTER (V.O.)
"Did you know it takes eleven muscles to yawn?

Close on Aster's face, smiling, stifling said yawn.

ASTER (V.O.)
"This is the sort of weird fact I find myself recalling to keep myself from... well, yawning..."

Trig uses the mirror app on his phone to groom himself.

ASTER (V.O.)
"...or showing anything that I feel, really."

37 CONTINUED: 37

Aster takes him in. He flexes his dimple in the mirror.

ASTER (V.O.)
"Assuming I know how I feel. So yeah, I turn to other people's words too."

Aster's attention drops back to her phone. On it: a downloaded version of REMAINS OF THE DAY.

ASTER (V.O.)
"Far better than my own."

38 INT. CARSON MCMANSION - LIVING ROOM - ANOTHER NIGHT 38 *

The Carson and Flores families gather for pre-dinner hors-d'oeuvres. Haute society, Squahamish-style.

TOM CARSON
You can't even imagine how much the right gravel can change your life!

DEACON FLORES
From gravel we came, to gravel we shall return! And this potato cake! Do I detect a hint of saffron?

Mrs. Carson preens.

DEACON FLORES (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)
(to Aster) *Sit up straight.*

Aster straightens. Trig snaps a selfie of the two of them. She smiles dutifully.

ASTER (V.O.)
"When you're a pretty girl - and I know it makes me sound conceited - but that's why you're even writing me, right?"

39 INT. SQUAHAMISH CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONFESSION BOOTH - DAY 39

Ellie and Paul look at each other... *She's not wrong.*

They go back to the letter.

ASTER (V.O.)
"When you're the pretty girl, people want to give you things..."

40 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - ASTER'S LOCKER/HALLWAY - ANOTHER DAY 40

Aster shuts her locker to reveal one of the QUADDIE GIRLS holding a knit neck gaiter. Exactly like the one she is wearing. And that of her three friends.

ASTER (V.O.)
"But what they really want is to make you like them."

QUADDIE GIRL #1 (AMBER)
It would look so cute on you!

ASTER
Oh. Thanks!

ASTER (V.O.)
"Not 'like them' as in 'I like you' but 'like them' as in 'I am *like* you.'"

QUADDIE GIRL #1 (AMBER)
Like... soooo cute on you!

QUADDIE GIRL #1 (AMBER) smiles at Aster expectantly.

ASTER
Oh! You mean right *now*.

41 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER 41

ASTER WALKS DOWN THE HALLWAY, FLANKED BY QUADDIE GIRLS, ALL IN NECK GAITERS.

Trig comes up behind and throws an arm around all of them, conferring his approval. Basks in their adoration.

ASTER (V.O.)
"So I'm like a lot of people."

42 INT. SQUAHAMISH CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONFESSION BOOTH - ANOTHER DAY 42

Ellie reads from the letter.

ELLIE
"Which makes me kind of no one."

She marinates in that for a beat.

42 CONTINUED: 42

PAUL
Can I text her now?

ELLIE
Too soon.

PAUL
I'm gonna do it.

ELLIE
If you want her to think you're like everyone else.

Paul stops. Sighs. Types on his phone.

CHA-CHING. Ellie looks at her phone.

HUSHMO NOTIFICATION: "HushMo: Paul M. sent you $50" *

ELLIE (V.O.)
"I never really thought about the oppression of fitting in before."

MONTAGE continues, in shorter letter snippets:

43 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD OUT OF TOWN - ANOTHER DAY 43

Ellie gathers speed on her bike.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"The good thing about being different is that no one expects you to be like them..."

PAUL (O.S.)
Wait up!

Paul huffs to catch up with Ellie. Ellie sighs.

44 INT. MRS. G'S CLASSROOM/EXT.PARKING LOT - ANOTHER DAY 44

Aster reads a letter hidden in her textbook.

ASTER (V.O.)
"...Doesn't everyone think they're 'different' but pretty much we're all different in the same way..."

Bell rings. Mrs. G dismisses class in background.

44 CONTINUED: 44

TRIG (O.S.)
Babe. Taco Time?

Trig's outside in his truck. Aster slams her book shut.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"...Some of us are more different than others. You might be surprised..."

A PAGE from the letter FALLS TO THE FLOOR, unseen, as Aster hurries to meet him.

45 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - GIRLS' BATHROOM - ANOTHER DAY 45

Ellie scrubs bike grease from her hands.

ASTER (V.O.)
"...Well, you *are* surprising."

Door opens.

Through the MIRROR:

TWO QUADDIE GIRLS enter stalls.

QUADDIE GIRL #1 (AMBER)
The one in Tukwila has a Gap Body.

QUADDIE GIRL #2 (SOLANGE)
I LOVE Gap Body!

Ellie can't quite get the grease out of her nails.

Door SWISHES. ASTER HAS ENTERED. She moves to the back wall, where she leans, waiting for a stall.

Her eyes meet Ellie's through the mirror. Ellie's snap down.

Aster takes in the back of Ellie. The wiry frame. Keys CLIPPED to belt loop. INK STAIN through back pocket.

QUADDIE GIRL #2 (SOLANGE) (CONT'D)
... it has like 15 dressing rooms.

QUADDIE GIRL #1 (AMBER)
Totes the better Gap.

QUADDIE GIRL #2 (SOLANGE)
Sooo much better than the one in Wenatchee.

45 CONTINUED: 45

QUADDIE GIRL #1 (AMBER)
Ugh. Wenatchee.

On Ellie face: puzzled. *Is this how normal girls talk?*

Aster smiles. Ellie blushes. The two girls share a moment.

QUADDIE GIRL #1 (AMBER) (CONT'D)
Trig checked in at Dick's FryFry!

QUADDIE GIRL #2 (SOLANGE)
Aster is so lucky.

QUADDIE GIRL #1 (AMBER)
Totes lucky. His family owns half of Squahamish.

QUADDIE GIRL #2 (SOLANGE)
Hers doesn't even own their house.

Aster, red-faced, slips out of the bathroom.

Ellie watches her go. Turns to look at the stalls.

DUAL FLUSHES.

Close on the STALL DOOR HINGE being shifted with a BIKE TOOL.

46 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - GIRLS' BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER 46

QUADDIE GIRL #2 (SOLANGE) (O.S.)
HEY. What's wrong with this door??

The stall doors rattle, unyielding.

QUADDIE GIRL #1 (AMBER) (O.S.)
What the--? HEY!

Rattle, rattle, rattle...

47 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - HALLWAY OUTSIDE GIRLS' BATHROOM/ - 47
MRS. G'S DOOR (CHEATED) - MOMENTS LATER

Ellie slips out of the bathroom.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"What's surprising is: people don't see what they're not looking for."

47 CONTINUED: 47

She merges anonymously into the fray... walking right through Aster casting a furtive glance across the hall at Paul.

ASTER (V.O.)
“The obvious unseen.”

RECORD SCRATCH as ELLIE IS SUDDENLY YANKED INTO...

48 INT. MRS. G'S CLASSROOM - MOMENTS LATER 48

...a classroom. She looks blankly at Mrs. G... who holds up a trampled stray page of a LETTER. Guilt floods Ellie’s face.

49 INT. MRS. G’S CLASSROOM - MOMENTS LATER 49

Mrs. G stares at Ellie, post-confession.

MRS G
Ellie. What you’re doing is *wrong*.

ELLIE
I know.

MRS G
This is a girl’s heart you’re playing with. Not just a money-making venture for you.

Ellie looks away... and Mrs. G sees the truth. More gently:

MRS G (CONT’D)
So this is why half the class is failing their essays.

ELLIE
I’ll be re-open for business soon enough. I mean this can’t go on much longer.

She slinks out. Mrs. G watches her go, concerned.

ASTER (V.O.)
“I’ve been thinking about what you said about ‘seeing’ and ‘not seeing.’”

50 INT. TEQULIA SAL Y LIMON - DAY/INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - ANOTHER DAY 50

Aster waits on a table of demanding customers at an upscale restaurant. She is accommodating, poised.

ASTER (V.O.)
"I had a painting teacher once tell me that the difference between a 'good' painting and a 'great' painting..."

While the customers bicker, her eyes land on a painting on the wall: a reproduction of Chagall's "Blue Lovers."

Her eyes take in the artistry of the painting.

ASTER (V.O.)
"...is typically five strokes. And they are usually the five boldest strokes in the painting. The question of course..."

We see a touch of longing in her gaze.

ASTER (V.O.)
"Is which five strokes?"

CLOSE ON THE PAINTING.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"I get it."

PULL OUT TO SEE: Ellie - in the engineer booth - staring at the same painting on her phone screen.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"After one's slaved away at making a "pretty good" painting, the last thing you'd want to do is..."

The SOUND of a HUGE RIP...

51 EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE - ANOTHER DAY 51

...OF A BURLAP SACK as cooked dried sausages pour out.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"...make a BOLD STROKE and potentially..."

51 CONTINUED: 51

ASTER (V.O.)
"...ruin everything. That's why I gave up painting." *

Wider to reveal THE SACK BEING RIPPED BY PAUL.

Next to him, ELLIE HOLDS UP HER PHONE displaying an IMAGE OF THE PAINTING, explaining.

Paul wipes sweat off his puzzled brow.

ASTER (V.O.)
"Still.. I wonder if that is how I'm living my life."

52 EXT. CARSON GRAVEL QUARRY - ANOTHER DAY 52

ASTER writes a letter, in the folds of her book.

ASTER (V.O.)
"It's a 'pretty good' life."

TRIG
Babe? Which one.

Trig holds up two very similar jean jackets. A photo shoot for a Carson Gravel ad campaign awaits him.

TRIG (CONT'D)
Right one, right? Great.

Aster goes back to her letter.

In the background, Trig throws an arm around his dad.

ASTER (V.O.)
"Probably the best life one could hope for in Squahamish."

PHOTO FLASH.

53 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - DAY 53

Ellie in her recliner. Widen to reveal Edwin asleep in his. She adjusts his quilt gently. Removes a half eaten chicken pie. Stares at it as if seeing it for the first time.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"Perhaps. But how well do you really know Squahamish...?"

54 EXT. SIDE OF AL'S BIG BEEFY - AFTERNOON - MULTIPLE DAYS 54

Aster rounds the corner, tentative. Consults A LETTER with geographic coordinates.

CRAPPY GRAFFITI lines the side wall of Al's Big Beefy.

Up high, in freshly sprayed BIG BOLD LETTERS:

"ANY FIVE STROKES..."

An ARROW points toward the expanse of graffitied wall. Another points to a CAN OF SPRAY PAINT hidden in the weeds.

Aster laughs. A cautious glance around... she PICKS UP the can and SPRAYS ONE BOLD STROKE. Exhilarated. Sneaks away.

ASTER (V.O.)
"...Your move..."

(Note: all V.O. lines will now appear as graffiti onto the wall, painted over once the next line appears.)

Dissolve to ELLIE now SPRAYING ANOTHER STROKE...

Alternate between the two...

ELLIE (V.O.)
"Oh so t*hat's* your boldest stroke?" *

ASTER (V.O.)
"I'm into the slow build! What was *
that?" *

ELLIE (V.O.)
"Decisiveness. But please... take *
all the time you need to be bold." *

ASTER (V.O.)
"Is THIS bold enough for you...?"

...as their SPRAY PAINT ART CREATION TAKES SHAPE.

It's a beautiful mess. Aster can't stop smiling.

ELLIE (V.O.)
"And thus was abstract art born..."

ASTER (V.O.)
"...and transformed." *

54 CONTINUED: 54

BIG BEEFY AL (O.S.)
HEY!

54 CONTINUED: (2) 54

Aster is startled... and takes off running. BIG BEEFY AL runs into frame, shaking his fist.

Dissolve into the wall NOW PAINTED GREY.

ELLIE (V.O.)
“Or not.”

ASTER (V.O.)
“Everything beautiful is ruined eventually.”

ELLIE (V.O.)
“Maybe that’s the thing. If you do ruin your painting...”

55 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - ANOTHER DAY 55

Ellie stares across the train tracks, lost in thought.

ASTER (V.O.)
“...you gotta know you have everything in you to get to that ‘pretty good’ painting again. But if you never do the bold stroke...”

56 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - MATH CLASSROOM - ANOTHER DAY 56

Aster stares out the window, lost in thought.

Bzzz. Aster glances down at her phone.

INSERT: MESSAGE FROM TRIG: “Don’t let me eat carbs today”

Aster deliberates. Puts her phone face down on her desk.

ELLIE (V.O.)
“...you’ll never know if you could have had a GREAT painting.”

She stares at a blank page. And starts sketching.

57 EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE - ANOTHER DAY 57

Paul empties the garbage.

PAUL
When does the “dating” start?

57 CONTINUED: 57

ELLIE
(a little dreamy) This is dating.

PAUL
No, dating is... BURGERS. And FRIES. And SHAKES. And maybe ANOTHER ORDER of FRIES. And... I'm gonna text her.

Sound of a TEXT SENDING. Startling Ellie.

ELLIE
Wait, *what*?

PAUL
At a certain point, you gotta close.

ELLIE
We're *not* at that point!

PAUL
We are *way* past that point!

Ellie grabs Paul's phone.

58 EXT. COWFIELD - SAME TIME 58

On ASTER'S PHONE:

"[A BURGER, FRIES, SHAKE and another FRIES emoji] tonite? I have [truck emoji]! [smiley emoji]!"

Aster stares at her phone. She is flanked by Quaddie Girls cheering on their boyfriends...

Who are "mudding" their trucks through a HUGE MUD PUDDLE.

59 EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE - SAME TIME 59

Ellie and Paul stare at his phone. "Thinking" dots appear.

ELLIE
Oh my god.

"Thinking dots" disappear.

Paul hurls a GARBAGE CAN to the ground.

59 CONTINUED: 59

PAUL
GODDAMN IT.

Ellie starts typing.

ELLIE
(writing aloud) “Sorry. Little sis hacked my phone. Can we take this onto a safer platform? Ghost Messenger? My handle’s.... SmithCorona.”

Thinking dots reappear.

PAUL
Who’s Smith Corona?

ELLIE
Just a... guy.

Dots disappear.

PAUL
Crap!

60 EXT.COWFIELD - SAME TIME 60

A TRUCK STUCK in the mud, wheels spinning.

TRIG
I’M KING OF THE MUD! Babe! Did you get that? Caption it MUDDING KING!

Off Aster’s face, considering...

61 EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE - SAME TIME 61

DING. From Ellie’s bookbag.

Ellie and Paul scramble for Ellie’s phone.

ELLIE’S SCREEN:

DiegaRivero: “Tomorrow? 7p?”

ELLIE PAUL
YES! YESSSSS!

Paul chest bumps the wall.

61 CONTINUED: 61

PAUL (CONT'D)
We did it!

Off Ellie's face realizing: *Paul* is going on this date.

62 EXT. SPARKY'S DINER - ANOTHER NIGHT 62

A truck pulls into the parking lot of a small-town diner.

ELLIE (OVER PHONE)
She prefers abstract to representational. And if she brings up Remains of the Day, talk about how the movie loses out by not spending more time on the Nazis--

PAUL (O.S.)
Relax, I got this.

ELLIE (OVER PHONE)
But--

PAUL (O.S.)
It's a date, not a book report.

63 INT. SPARKY'S DINER - NIGHT 63

Aster slides a copy of REMAINS OF THE DAY across the booth.

ASTER
I got two of them signed when he came to Powell's books last year. I drove all night to get there.

Her face is lit, shy, expectant.

PAUL
Oh. Uh. Cool!

ASTER
You've probably read it. But I thought you'd like one.

PAUL
Yeah. Totally. I love... Nazis!

Aster is confused.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I mean the ones in the book.

63 CONTINUED: 63

Close on his phone in his lap, connected to...

64 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - SAME TIME 64

...Ellie's phone. Ellie listens, horrified.

PAUL (OVER PHONE)
More of *those* Nazis, am I right?

She groans.

65 INT. SPARKY'S DINER - SAME TIME 65

Milkshakes arrive. Paul sips, nervously.

Aster, flustered, tries again.

ASTER
Speaking of Nazis, thanks for meeting me here. My dad is... not a *Nazi* exactly... but he can be a little strict. And people talk.

PAUL
Oh. Yeah. Talk. UGH.

Silence.

ASTER
But it's nice to make a new friend.

PAUL
Friend. Yeah. Good.

He has sucked down his milkshake. Toys with the straw.

PAUL (CONT'D)
They use ReddiWhip.

ASTER
Oh.

PAUL
It's from a can. But it's okay.

More silence. Awkward. So awkward.

66 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - SAME TIME 66

It's all over Ellie's face: *this is a disaster*.

67 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD OUT OF TOWN - DAY 67

Ellie bikes up the hill, Paul trying to catch up.

PAUL
It wasn't that bad.

ELLIE
What about that date wasn't *bad*?
You have *nothing* in common-

PAUL
Not yet but-

ELLIE
Game over.

PAUL
We can't give up-

Paul has in fact given up and is dry heaving behind some shrubs.

ELLIE
Look. You and Aster Flores? NOT GONNA HAPPEN.

HOOONK. The truck of OBNOXIOUS TEENS cruises by.

OBNOXIOUS TEENS
(heckling) CHUGGA CHUGGA CHUGGA, CHUGGA-CHUGGA-CHUGGA... CHU CHU!

PAUL (O.S.)
HEY!

Paul jumps out from the side of the road and STARTS CHASING AFTER THE TRUCK.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Who you calling Choo-Choo?

Obnoxious Teens freeze.

ELLIE
(embarrassed) Let it go...

67 CONTINUED: 67

PAUL
What kind of wusses say dumb shit *
then drive away? I'M GONNA GET YOU!

They tear off, shakily, Paul bearing down on them.

He hurls a rock. From far off: "OW!"

PAUL (CONT'D)
YOU BETTER RUN!

Turns back to see Ellie staring at him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
WHAT?

Her eyes wide as saucers.

68 EXT. ABANDONED TRAIN CAR - LATER THAT DAY 68

Ellie coils cable in the back of the car. Paul hovers.

ELLIE
Aster Flores thinks you're into abstract art... and repressed British literature and-

PAUL
Yeah!

ELLIE
None of that is *you*.

PAUL
It could be. I started reading that *Remains of the Day* book.

ELLIE
Really?

PAUL
(admits) Fell asleep a few times... but I'm still reading it! That's gotta count for something.

ELLIE
There are no points for effort.

PAUL
Isn't that what love is? The effort you put into loving someone?

68 CONTINUED: 68

Is that true?

ELLIE
Well, whatever love is... we just blew it with Aster Flores.

DING. On Ellie's phone, A MESSAGE:

"DiegaRivero: So that was... weird?"

PAUL
YESSS! (then to Ellie) I can do this. *We* can do this.

He wants this so bad...

ELLIE
(sighs) Okay.

Joy floods Paul's face.

PAUL
I'll pay you double.

ELLIE
You don't have to pay me.

PAUL
Don't be weird, dude! Why else would you do this? I got savings!

Off Ellie's conflicted expression...

69 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH/CHU APARTMENT WINDOW - ANOTHER DAY 69

Ellie draws A GAME PLAN on A WHITE BOARD in her ticket booth. ("Existentialism") Paul outside the booth, jogging in place.

ELLIE
Your next date is three weeks away.

PAUL
Three *weeks*?

ELLIE
You told her you're slammed with football training.

PAUL
I did?

69 CONTINUED: 69

ELLIE
Yes. Also you're in a debate on who's the better Hepburn-

EDWIN (O.S.)
WHO THERE?

From the APARTMENT WINDOW ABOVE, Edwin wields a kitchen sprayer.

ELLIE
Sorry to wake you, Baba. School project.

PAUL
Hi Ellie Chu's dad!

Edwin shoots Paul a suspicious glance. Retreats.

ELLIE
(whispering) We don't have time to school you on everything Aster thinks "you" are, so we have to be selective. Deep vs. broad-based learning.

PAUL
Hunh?

ELLIE
We spy on her, then cram you on her Greatest Hits.

PAUL
(loud whisper) Oh. Cool.

ELLIE
Are you ready for this?

PAUL
Yes.

ELLIE
ARE you READY For This?

PAUL
YES! SIR YES SIR!

ELLIE
Ssshh! So in *No Exit*, three people are trapped in hell...

69 CONTINUED: (2) 69

Cue “Rocky”-themed training MONTAGE...

70 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - MORNING 70

Paul jogs alongside Ellie on her bike.

PAUL
That’s nuts. He can’t stand these people, a door opens for him to leave - *but he doesn’t leave*?

ELLIE
He’s trapped in hell. It’s a metaphor for existence.

PAUL
My Nana hated Minnesota. She left.

ELLIE
Your Nana is not one of the great thinkers of the 20th century!

PAUL
My Nana’s not trapped in hell either!

Ellie groans and pedals faster.

PAUL (CONT’D)
Hey! Where you going?

He picks up the pace...

71 EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - TRACK - ANOTHER AFTERNOON 71

...until he is now running on the track, passing teammates left and right. *

COACH
What the hell’s gotten into Munsky?

A72 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - ANOTHER DAY A72 *

CLOSEUP: ELLIE'S HAND UNDERLINES "HEPBURN" ON A WHITEBOARD

72 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - ANOTHER DAY 72

Edwin alone in his La-Z-Boy. An untouched pot pie next to Ellie's lounger. On TV, it's a "HEPBURN-A-THON!"

He shoots a glance toward the window.

73 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH/CHU APARTMENT WINDOW - DAY - SAME TIME 73

Ellie, in booth, draws a diagram with "Katherine Hepburn" in the middle; "Cary Grant", "Jimmy Stewart" and "John Howard" surround her. Paul eats a sausage, outside the booth.

KATHERINE HEPBURN/TRACY LORD (ON TV)
"I don't want to be worshipped. I want to be loved."

ELLIE
The key thing about "The Philadelphia Story" is that it's a plea for tolerance...

PAUL
Check this out.

He holds up a sausage wrapped in a corn tortilla.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I'm calling it "Taco Sausage." Wanna bite?

ELLIE
No. So, *tolerance*...

PAUL
(trying out slogans)
Two hand foods. One great taste!

A74 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - ANOTHER DAY A74

INSERT: ON THE WHITEBOARD: "CONVERSATION LESSONS"

74 INT. SHITTY REC ROOM - DAY 74

Ellie serves the ball at a ping pong table.

ELLIE
Conversation is like ping pong. I hit one, then you--

Paul SLAMS the ball back. It flies wildly.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
WHAT THE--?

PAUL
(sheepish) Oops...

A75 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - ANOTHER DAY A75

INSERT: ON WHITEBOARD: "RECONNAISSANCE"

75 INT. MOVIE THEATER - ANOTHER AFTERNOON 75

Onscreen: A SLASHER TEEN FILM, one moment before SLASHING.

Pan the anxious faces of Quaddie Girls... to land on Aster.

Pull back to reveal PAUL seated with TEAM DUDES... further still to ELLIE, in back row alone, taking notes.

The SLASHING HAPPENS! Girls SCREAM! Aster GUFFAWS!

Paul and Ellie lock eyes, excited. *More data!*

One of his football buddies stares at him quizzically: who's he checking?

Paul spins back.

76 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - ANOTHER DAY 76

On the WHITEBOARD: a hand writes "Likes a good slashing."

77 OMITTED 77

78 INT. PHARMACY - ANOTHER DAY 78

ASTER drops a TUBE OF TOOTHPASTE in her cart and moves on. ELLIE and PAUL'S HEADS poke around the aisle.

79 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - ANOTHER DAY 79

Now on the WHITEBOARD: "Flavor Crystals. Woodsy Scents."

80 OMITTED 80

81 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - ANOTHER DAY 81

ON THE WHITEBOARD: "OPPO RESEARCH"

Unable to find more whiteboard space, Ellie maps out a "GOOD COP/BAD COP" interrogation scene on the glass of the Engineer booth for a confused Paul, who can't read it backwards.

82 EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - PARKING LOT/TRIG'S TRUCK - ANOTHER DAY 82

Trig in his truck. Ellie and Paul pop up on either side. *

ELLIE
We're writing a profile on the student we most admire!

This checks out for Trig.

TRIG
Cool, cool.

ELLIE
What are your views on women in the workplace?

PAUL
Does Aster like lean meats?

Ellie and Paul confer over the top of the truck cab.

ELLIE
What are you doing?

PAUL
What are *you* doing?

ELLIE
I'm good cop.

82 CONTINUED: 82

PAUL
If you're good cop, how come you're not smiling?

ELLIE
I'll SMILE when you follow the plan I CAREFULLY--

From below...

TRIG
(thinking aloud) I'm surprised more kids haven't asked to interview me.

An oblivious Trig stares at his reflection.

Paul points to his "smile." Ellie sighs.

83 EXT. ABANDONED TRAIN CAR - ANOTHER DAY 83

On a GLASS WINDOW under: "OPPO RESEARCH": "Doesn't know her favorite food. Or band. Or anything." Reveal Ellie writing on one of the windows of the train car. Paul next to her.

84 EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - PARKING LOT - ANOTHER DAY 84

Aster clears her lunch and moves on. Reveal Paul in the foreground, marks a grid.

85 EXT. ABANDONED TRAIN CAR - ANOTHER DAY 85

On GLASS: "Eats all meats. Hates raisins."

Reveal: Ellie and Paul in a train car filled with writing. She's gone full-on "Homeland" in this mission.

86 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - MORNING 86

Paul overtakes Ellie on her bike and suddenly is...

87 EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - ANOTHER NIGHT 87

...RUNNING toward the ENDZONE and ALMOST CATCHES A WILD PASS!

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
WOAH! The Squahamish Moose ALMOST SCORED!
(MORE)

87 CONTINUED: 87

ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
That would be the first score in fifteen years! Nice hustle from #86... P. Munsky!

The half-filled stands half-cheer, Aster among them.

Paul breaks into a toothy smile.

88 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - SAME TIME 88

Ellie listens to the game. Pumps her fist. Gets a text from Aster: “Cute smile.” Bittersweet.

End TRAINING MONTAGE MUSIC.

89 EXT. OUTSIDE FLORES HOME - DINING ROOM/INT. PAUL’S TRUCK - ANOTHER NIGHT 89

Through a large dining room window: the Flores’ at dinner.

Across the way, inside THE CAB OF A TRUCK, Ellie and Paul are on a “stakeout.” Ellie takes notes. Paul’s stomach GROWLS.

PAUL
You’re not hungry?

ELLIE
Not if it’s not time to eat.

PAUL
That’s weird.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: The Deacon says a loooong grace. Mrs. Flores notices Aster’s collar is askew. Adjusts it lovingly.

Ellie’s face shows a touch of yearning. Paul sees it.

PAUL (CONT’D)
Can I ask you a question?

ELLIE
I don’t want to try a taco sausage.

PAUL
Why Squahamish?

Ellie looks at Paul. *What kind of question is that?*

89 CONTINUED: 89

PAUL (CONT'D)
Your dad seems so unhappy here. And you also seem kinda unhappy.

Ellie unbuckles her seat belt.

ELLIE
I gotta go.

PAUL
Wait--

ELLIE
You're not taking this seriously, I have a ton of work to do--

PAUL
I just think you're so, like, smart, too smart to--

ELLIE
--waste my time trying to win you some girl who'll probably never--

PAUL
--it just seems weird--

ELLIE
--You're weird!

PAUL
No! I mean, yes--

ELLIE
Enjoy your "happy" life in Squahamish!

She's about to slam the truck door. Paul springs across the front seat, catches the door before it closes.

89 CONTINUED: (2) 89

PAUL
The thing about *No Exit* is it's like how what I really want is to run my own shop - one with new recipes - and FYI, "TACO SAUSAGE" IS REALLY EFFIN GOOD - but I'm just the fourth son, and my family has made the same dogs for 49 years, and doesn't matter that we're going out of style or broke - it's Nana's recipe, and if my Ma can't have her Nana, at least she can keep making her sausages, and if I break away, I'd break her heart, and it's her heart or mine so... I stay.

Paul is breathless. It's more words than he's ever said.

Ellie slowly gets back into the truck. Exhales.

ELLIE
We had to go where my dad could get a job.

PAUL
He studied trains?

ELLIE
Engineering. PhD, no less.

PAUL
So he became... the Station Manager at Squahamish?

ELLIE
To start. Plan was to be promoted to "System Engineer" or... *anything* "Engineer". Squahamish was a jumping off point. (beat) Turns out speaking good English trumps a PhD. Or one from China, anyway. And my dad--

PAUL
Has a hard time speaking.

ELLIE
(bristling) He's not *bad*.

PAUL
I have a hard time speaking too.

89 CONTINUED: (3) 89

ELLIE
True. What's your excuse?

Tension broken. Paul grins. He starts the engine.

PAUL
How do you feel about pot roast?

ELLIE
I should get back to the station.

PAUL
We gotta eat.

Ellie's stomach GROWLS. They drive away.

90 INT. MUNSKY HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT 90

It's mayhem. The six members of Paul's family: COLLEEN (MA), BILL (PA), brothers GREG, PETE, TOMMY, and sister LENA function like one chaotic organism.

Paul and Ellie stand off to the side, unnoticed.

GREG MUNSKY
So Marcy and me are thinking Vegas for the honeymoon! Cheap AND fancy!

PETE MUNSKY
Dog-wrestling, Pa! Sport of the near future!

LENA MUNSKY
Tommy, stop friending my friends!

TOMMY MUNSKY
Stop making hot friends!

BILL MUNSKY (PA)
You're *not* running a dog-wrestling ring out of our house!

COLLEEN MUNSKY
NO ONE gets married until they can afford to move out and pay rent!

Paul glances at a stunned Ellie.

PAUL
Or we could go to your place?

90 CONTINUED: 90

Off Ellie's uncertain look.

91 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - NIGHT 91

Ellie in her La-Z-Boy, pot pie in hand, eyes glued nervously to the TV. (On screen: another classic. "City Lights?")

Widen to reveal Paul CURLED ON THE FLOOR next to her, also eating a pot pie.

Widen further to reveal EDWIN, in his La-Z-Boy, glaring.

Cue the opening strains of a guitar playing "Half Way."

92 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - MORNING 92

Ellie biking at 75% speed with Paul keeping up.

93 INT. SHITTY REC ROOM SOMEWHERE - ANOTHER DAY 93

We're back at the ping pong table.

ELLIE
Match energy. Match strokes. Then just say one thing.

Paul nods, deliberate and slow. Ellie serves.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Where were you born?

Paul hits the ball back, gently.

PAUL
In Squahamish. What about you?

ELLIE
Okay good! That wasn't so hard!

PAUL
But where *were* you born?

ELLIE
I don't need talking practice.

PAUL
Just seems like a really short conversation.

93 CONTINUED: 93

Damn. He has a point.

ELLIE (O.S.)
I was born in Suzhou. China.

PAUL
When did you come here?

ELLIE
When I was five. What do you like about Squahamish?

PAUL
I've never been anywhere else.

Beat.

ELLIE
Me neither.

The ball continues between them.

94 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - ANOTHER NIGHT 94

Back in the apartment watching another classic film.

Paul offers Edwin and Ellie a taco sausage. They decline.

95 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH/INT. FLORES HOUSE (INTERCUTTING ELLIE/ASTER) - ANOTHER LATE NIGHT 95

SUPERIMPOSE: "diegarivero: Favorite time of day?"

SUPERIMPOSE: "smithcorona: Probably... now"

SUPERIMPOSE: "diegarivero: Smooth..."

Angle on Ellie, alone, smiling at her phone.

96 INT. SQUAHAMISH CATHOLIC CHURCH - CHAPEL - DAY 96

Ellie is at the organ while the Deacon delivers a homily.

Father Shanley awakes with a jerk.

FATHER SHANLEY
OUTSIDE ARE THE DOGS AND THE SORCERERS--

96 CONTINUED: 96

Ellie sneaks a peak at Aster, head bent over her devotional.

SUPERIMPOSE: “diegarivero: Think Father Shanley has any idea what’s going on around him?”

SUPERIMPOSE: “smithcorona: I think Father Shanley KNOWS ALL.”

Aster’s mouth twitches upward. From her organ, Ellie smiles.

Aster turns to look at Paul... who breaks into a goofy smile.

Ellie’s eyes drop to the organ keys.

97 INT. MRS. G’S CLASSROOM - ANOTHER AFTERNOON 97

Ellie dodges Mrs. G’s gaze on her way out. Then turns back.

ELLIE
You know what it’s like to *finally* meet someone your age who *gets* you?

MRS G
You know where else you can meet people your age who *get* you? COLLEGE.

Ellie slinks out.

98 INT. SQUAHAMISH CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONFESSION BOOTH - ANOTHER AFTERNOON 98

Ellie and Paul back in the booth, arguing. Father Shanley confused in the booth between them.

PAUL
You should send some emojis!

ELLIE
I’m not sending her emojis!

PAUL
Oh! Do Pineapple, Owl, Caterpillar with glasses!

ELLIE
What does that MEAN? That doesn’t mean ANYTHING!

98 CONTINUED: 98

PAUL
Glasses make the caterpillar look smart!

This deep debate rings out over the empty chapel.

99 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD OUT OF TOWN - ANOTHER AFTERNOON 99

Ellie at full speed. Paul keeping up.

100 INT. SHITTY REC ROOM SOMEWHERE - ANOTHER DAY 100

Back to conversation lessons.

PAUL
Favorite food?

ELLIE
Braised pork over rice. Yours?

PAUL
Taco sausage!

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Taco sausage.

PAUL
Does braised pork have five-spice powder?

ELLIE
How do you know five-spice powder?

PAUL
Kinda creeped in your cabinets.

Ellie shoots him a look.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I'm always looking for new spices.

ELLIE
Giving up on the taco sausage?

PAUL
No way! I've been writing to the paper in Wenatchee for months now. If I could get their guy to just taste it...

ELLIE
Gateway to greatness *is* Wenatchee.

100 CONTINUED: 100

PAUL
Yeah. You gotta try it!

ELLIE
What do the other Munsky's think?

PAUL
They haven't tried it.

He's bummed. She sees it. Then softly...

ELLIE
"Taco sausage" has a nice ring.

PAUL
Right?

He brightens.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Hey.

ELLIE
Yeah?

PAUL
What was your mom like?

ELLIE
Young. Funny. Dead.

PAUL
Before she died.

Beat.

ELLIE
Young. Funny. (beat) Fun.

Paul's listening intently.

PAUL
She sounds cool.

ELLIE
Yeah.

Now Ellie's embarrassed.

PAUL
Bet she would have tried the taco sausage.

100 CONTINUED: (2) 100

Ellie throws the ball at him.

101 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH/INT. FLORES HOUSE (INTERCUTTING ELLIE/ASTER) - ANOTHER LATE NIGHT 101

Diegarivero: Why is late night your fave?

Smithcorona: World asleep. More room for thoughts

DiegaRivero: Hour of secrets?

Smithcorona: Something like that

DiegaRivero: So what secrets...?

Angle on Ellie biting her lip.

102 INT. SHITTY REC ROOM SOMEWHERE - NEXT DAY 102

Back to convo lessons. Ellie's thoughts still on last night.

ELLIE
What do you like about Aster?

PAUL
She's pretty and smart and she's never mean and she smells like fresh ground flour. Why?

ELLIE
Just wondering.

PAUL
Why else could I like her?

ELLIE
I don't know. (now thinking) How her eyes look right into yours... How she twirls her hair when she's reading. How her laugh busts out like she can't help herself and she stops being so... *PERFECT* for just a few moments. How she has at least five different voices. How you could live in an ocean of her thoughts and feel like she knows you, like really KNOWS--

Ellie stops mid-sentence. Paul is staring at her.

102 CONTINUED: 102

PAUL
I am so stupid.

ELLIE
(nervously) I just mean-

PAUL
I am so dumb. A real idiot.

ELLIE
I wouldn't-- don't-

PAUL
What you just said? *That's* what you say when you love someone.

ELLIE
No! I was just talking-

PAUL
No, it *is*. And you don't even care! I love her and I can't... UGH!

He slams his paddle onto the table. Ellie exhales in relief. Then realizes: Paul's miserable. She takes him in. Gently:

ELLIE
You try harder than anyone I've ever met - with the possible exception of my dad with my mom - to show a girl you love them... And if love isn't the effort you put in... then what is it?

Paul looks up.

PAUL
Yeah?

ELLIE
Yeah.

He brightens.

Sound of a TOASTER OVEN DOOR OPENING.

103 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - NIGHT 103

CLOSE ON PAUL'S HAND pulling out three broiled sausages.

103 CONTINUED: 103

Everyone in their respective positions in front of the TV. Each with a “taco sausage” before them.

Ellie watches Edwin glare at his sausage, take the tiniest bite... His brows shoot up. He takes another.

Ellie, now curious, bites into her sausage. Eyes widen. It’s insanely delicious.

Paul’s face breaks into smile of unbearable sweetness.

104 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - NIGHT 104

Edwin has fallen asleep.

Ellie and Paul, still watching TV, drink Yakults.

ELLIE
I can’t believe you know Yakult.

PAUL
County Stadium vending machine.
Keeps the coaches regular.

ELLIE
Seriously? The only Asian grocery
is three hours by bike.

Paul shoots her a thoughtful glance.

ON THE TV: A train pulls out of a station.

ELLIE (CONT’D)
(to TV) Do not run after her train.
Do NOT... Do NOT... Ugh.

PAUL
Kinda sweet.

ELLIE
Kinda trite.

PAUL
It shows he cares!

ELLIE
It shows he’s a *moron*. Who outruns
trains? *That* girl’s thinking: thank
god I got out before wasting my
life on that idiot.

104 CONTINUED: 104

ONSCREEN: Cut to girl on train.

PAUL
She looks sad.

ELLIE
Then she’s a moron too.

Paul sniffles.

105 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - LATE NIGHT 105

SUPERIMPOSE: “smithcorona: No secrets. Just a good guy... And you should be with a good guy.” *

The song “Half Way” wraps up...

106 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - ELLIE'S ATTIC BEDROOM - ANOTHER NIGHT 106

... as we reveal Ellie in her room, noodling on her mom’s old guitar, sorting out the final lines of a song.

The last bars drift out her window to...

107 EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE/EXT. ELLIE’S ATTIC BEDROOM WINDOW - SAME TIME 107

...the back of Munsky Sausage Shop, where Paul has stopped garbage duty to listen. Moved.

The song ends.

The light in Ellie’s window goes off.

108 EXT./INT. SPARKY'S DINER/PAUL’S TRUCK - ANOTHER NIGHT 108

Paul’s truck is in the parking lot.

IN THE TRUCK

Paul toys nervously with the zipper on his down vest.

Sound of a BIKE SCREECH outside.

Ellie throws herself into the cab, breathless.

108 CONTINUED: 108

ELLIE
Lost track of time practicing for Senior Recital. I'm a little freaked about it, but whatever. Okay. ASTER. If she brings up immigration, you've been talking about the recent--

PAUL
I know.

ELLIE
When in doubt, if the name is Italian, probably an artist, if French, probably a--

PAUL
Hey.

What?

PAUL (CONT'D)
Thanks.

ELLIE
Oh. Sure.

PAUL
I'm probably gonna crash and burn. But thanks for sticking it out with me anyway.

ELLIE
Well. Not like you didn't pay me.

PAUL
Well. Thanks.

Paul starts to go.

ELLIE
Hey.

What?

ELLIE (CONT'D)
You're not gonna crash and burn.

She gives him a thumbs up. His face lights into a huge grin.

He's gone. She exhales anxiously.

108 CONTINUED: (2) 108

ELLIE (CONT'D)
You're totally gonna crash and burn.

She starts worrying the zipper on her down vest.

109 INT. SPARKY'S DINER - MOMENTS LATER 109

Paul sits across from Aster. It's awkward.

ASTER
So I was wondering--

PAUL
How about that immigration bill--

PAUL (CONT'D)
Sorry, go ahead.

ASTER
No, you.

PAUL
Oh uh. The immigration bill?

ASTER
Un hunh?

PAUL
Uh. Right?

ASTER
(confused) Right?

PAUL
Yup.

They lapse into silence.

110 INT. SPARKY'S DINER/INT. PAUL'S TRUCK - SAME TIME 110

The conversation plays over Ellie's phone, linked to Paul's.

ELLIE
Come on, dude.

111 INT. SPARKY'S DINER - SAME TIME 111

The waitress drops off their order.

111 CONTINUED: 111

ASTER
We don't have to talk about... serious things.

PAUL
Oh. Okay.

More silence.

PAUL (CONT'D)
What were you about to say?

ASTER
Oh, uh. It's still cool that we're... friends?

PAUL
Yeah. Cool. Friends.

Now even more awkward.

112 EXT. SPARKY'S DINER/INT. PAUL'S TRUCK - SAME TIME 112

Ellie pulls out her phone.

113 INT. SPARKY'S DINER/INT. PAUL'S TRUCK - SAME TIME 113

Bzzz. Aster looks at her phone.

ASTER
You messaged me!

PAUL
(confused) ...Yup.

CLOSE ON ASTER, short-sided (Paul's truck POV). SUPERIMPOSED on negative space behind her:

Smithcorona: I get nervous when you're close.

Aster looks back at Paul. Smiles.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Yup...?

DiegaRivero: Why?

SmithCorona: ...

DING. WHIP-PAN TO PAUL, STARING AT ELLIE.

113 CONTINUED: 113

Paul: Wut????

Ellie: Look at your phone!

WHIP-PAN BACK TO ASTER.

DiegaRivero: ...?

SmithCorona: ..... (Aster smiles)

DiegaRivero: I'm just a girl.

SmithCorona: You're *not* just a girl.

DING. Ugh. WHIP-PAN BACK TO PAUL.

Paul: WUT. ARE. YOU. SAYING???

Ellie: STOP. LOOKING. AT. ME!!!

WHIP-PAN back to Aster.

DiegaRivero: I'm not? Then what are you?

SmithCorona: Also... not just a girl

Aster laughs. Looks up at Paul.

He gives her a wide, confused smile. And a thumbs up.

Aster's not sure how to react.

Ellie groans.

DiegaRivero: You're strange. But cute.

Ellie is out of her depth.

SmithCorona: You have... classic bone structure.

Aster's lips twitch up.

DiegaRivero: ... Thanks.

Ellie flushes. She tries again.

SmithCorona: I think you are...

She deletes it.

SmithCorona: You are...

113 CONTINUED: (2) 113

Delete. She takes a breath.

SmithCorona: The thing is...

114 INT. SPARKY'S DINER - SAME TIME 114

Paul can take it no longer... and STANDS. Flushed with conviction.

Aster looks up from her screen, startled.

115 EXT. SPARKY'S DINER/INT. PAUL'S TRUCK - SAME TIME 115

ELLIE
What?? No! BAD. Sit!

116 INT. SPARKY'S DINER - SAME TIME 116

PAUL
I don't want to be just friends.

ASTER
Oh!

The whole diner's watching.

PAUL
I think you are pretty and funny and smart and your laugh is like... an ocean of thoughts... or five oceans of thoughts... or five voices or... (blurts) I LIKE YOU. *

ASTER
(flushed) I don't know what to say.

PAUL
Me neither. I'm not a good talker.

He's so earnest. She smiles.

ASTER
That's okay.

He reaches for her hand. She lets him.

117 EXT. SPARKY'S DINER/INT. PAUL'S TRUCK - SAME TIME 117

Ellie slips out of the truck. Her work is done here.

118 EXT. SPARKY'S DINER/ROAD BACK TO SQUAHAMISH - NIGHT 118

We follow her tiny bike light as it heads into the night.

119 INT. CLOTHESTOWN - DAY 119

A jubilant Paul high fives MANNEQUINS.

PAUL
What up haters! Who rocked their second date? *#86 Pauuuul MUNSKY*!

Ellie picks through a row of ON SALE CARDIGANS.

PAUL (CONT'D)
And now his side girl is gonna *rock* THE SENIOR RECITAL!

ELLIE
It's a piano solo.

She pulls a cardigan over her hoodie.

PAUL
You're gonna be AWESOME!

ELLIE
I'm gonna be puking.

PAUL
You're *always* playing for an audience.

ELLIE
On the side. Not on stage. Alone.

PAUL
You're gonna crush it. OH. Did I tell you that some food guy from the paper in Tukwila wrote me? Musta heard about me from the guy in Wenatchee. He says he likes how my sausage sounds and wants to try it! Boom! It's Munsky time!

He shadow boxes... anything.

119 CONTINUED: 119

ELLIE
Hey! Look at you.

She pulls a pleated skirt over her jeans.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
So... (attempting to be casual)
what did you and Aster talk about?

PAUL
I dunno. We got milkshakes and
fries and held hands and it was...
quiet and... (realizes) *nice*.

He relives that moment.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Then she had curfew so we walked to
her car... and I kissed her.

Ellie fiddles with a zipper.

ELLIE
How does that happen?

PAUL
What?

ELLIE
The kiss.

PAUL
(shrugs) I kissed her.

ELLIE
You don't ask first?

PAUL
No one asks first.

ELLIE
Then how do you know she *wants* to
be kissed?

PAUL
(thinks) She gives you a *look*.

ELLIE
A *look*?

He fixes Ellie with a "look." She is confused.

119 CONTINUED: (2) 119

PAUL
(sighs) It's a LOOK. And when you see the look? *You make your move*... or you come off like a real putz.

This is Greek to Ellie.

PAUL (CONT'D)
And now we're going out on a date date - not a friend date - when she gets back from some youth group in Sacramento!

He reaches out for a high-five. Notices her motley outfit.

PAUL (CONT'D)
There are dressing rooms, you know.

ELLIE
I'll just get this.

PAUL
Really?

ELLIE
Yeah?

She sounds less certain than usual. Paul takes her in.

PAUL
Without the jeans and flannel shirt...

Ellie straightens.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You look weird.

She slumps.

ELLIE
Gee thanks.

PAUL
It just doesn't look like you. All girl-ed up.

ELLIE
I know.

She's deflated.

119 CONTINUED: (3) 119

PAUL
Go to the dressing room. I'll toss you some things.

ELLIE
You're a *dude*-

PAUL
I have a sister. Go.

He starts browsing with intention.

120 INT. CLOTHESTOWN - DAY 120

Ellie comes out of the dressing room in a fitted blue shirt and skinny slacks. She looks... good.

PAUL
(amazed) You look better than I thought you could.

ELLIE
Gee. *Thanks*.

PAUL
I mean you look like *you*. But better.

ELLIE
Yay. *

Despite the snark, she seems... almost happy.

Cue a rendition of "In Your Eyes" by Peter Gabriel...

121 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - ASSEMBLY HALL - ANOTHER NIGHT 121

... played onstage by A TRIO of OBOES.

FROM THE WINGS

Ellie peeks out at the PACKED HOUSE of students and their families.

EMCEE
Well our next Senior needs no introduction!

A chant picks up: "Trig! Trig! Trig!"...

121 CONTINUED: 121

And with that, TRIG IS ON STAGE, electric guitar flung over his back, a BACKING BAND behind him.

TRIG
WHAT UP, SQUAHAMISH MOOSE!

The crowd is on its feet.

TRIG (CONT'D)
YOU KNOW WHO I AM. I KNOW WHO I AM.
LET'S DO THIS.

He launches into a cover of "Pour Some Sugar On Me". It's terrible. The audience is enthralled.

BACKSTAGE

Ellie slumps at a piano. A STAGE MANAGER pokes her head in.

STAGE MANAGER
Ellie Chu? 3 mins til go time. Last chance to pee.

Great. Ellie heads to the bathroom.

The Obnoxious Bullies sneak in and fiddle with the piano.

IN THE AUDITORIUM

Paul slips in, pulling off a Munsky Sausage apron.

To chants of TRIG! TRIG! TRIG! Trig strides off-stage with his band... passing a lone Ellie, rolling her piano on.

EMCEE (O.S.)
Let's give it up next for...
(consults clipboard) Ellie Chu!

FROM THE AUDIENCE

OBNOXIOUS BULLIES
Chugga-chugga-chugga- CHIU CHIU!

Paul glares into the crowd.

ONSTAGE

Ellie settles onto the piano, her back to the audience.

She takes a breath. Starts to play. It is WILDLY DISCORDANT.

She stops. THE PIANO IS HORRIBLY OUT OF TUNE.

121 CONTINUED: (2) 121

The Obnoxious Bullies cackle at their prank.

The audience is restless.

Ellie is frozen.

PAUL
Oh no. *

BACKUP BAND DUDE
(catcalling) NEXT!

Audience laughter. Paul glares at Backup Band Dude... Notices his guitar.

ONSTAGE

Ellie still frozen when A GUITAR SLIDES ACROSS THE STAGE and STOPS BEHIND HER. She turns.

Paul gestures from the side: *Play it.*

Ellie looks at the guitar. At the crowd. Back at Paul.

She turns around on the bench. Closes her eyes. Starts to play “Half Way.” Her voice starts shaky... then steadies... finishing pure and clear and strong.

It is dead silent in the auditorium.

AND THEN THE CROWD GOES WILD.

Ellie is startled. *What is happening?*

IN THE AUDIENCE

Paul beams. Doesn’t even notice Trig next to him.

TRIG
When did Ellie Chu get kinda hot?

Paul stares at Ellie. *When indeed?*

ONSTAGE

A flushed Ellie takes it all in.

122 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ENGINEER BOOTH - LATER 122

Ellie is in the lit booth, alone, still smiling.

122 CONTINUED: 122

A car pulls up, Paul in the passenger seat.

PAUL
Come on! *

Friendly people wave her over. Ellie deliberates.

123 INT. CARSON MCMANSION - NIGHT 123

A high school party in full swing.

Ellie trails Paul's crew, backpack squarely on shoulders.

ONE PERSON
The Chinese girl came!

RANDOM PARTY PEOPLE
CHINESE GIRL!

Red Solo Party cups are raised.

A GIRL FROM MATH CLASS runs up.

GIRL FROM MATH CLASS
Ellie Chu! I just wanted to say that we've had math together all four years, and I've always wanted to tell you that I like your nails.

ELLIE
Oh. (embarrassed) Yeah, I can't get the bike grease out.

GIRL FROM MATH CLASS
They look badass! Want to play Drinkers of Catan?

She pulls Ellie into the fray.

GIRL FROM MATH CLASS (CONT'D)
It's like Settlers but...

Ellie looks back at Paul, who gives her a thumbs up.

124 INT. CARSON MCMANSION - LATER 124

Paul moves along the periphery, clearing stray cups and trash, as he keeps on eye on ELLIE LAUGHING WITH HER PEERS, having the time of her life.

124 CONTINUED: 124

ELLIE
I will trade you Wheat for Rye.

SENIOR GUY
Bourbon it is.

A senior guy hands Ellie a full cup. Paul intercepts.

PAUL
Thanks.

Ellie gives him a hard look.

ELLIE
I want you to know (pause) that I can tell I have been drinking spirits (pause). Because I have to pee far more often than would be indicated by plain punch. So don't think I haven't been monitoring the situation.

Triumphant look.

PAUL
Cool, cool. So how many cups have you monitored?

Ummmmmmmm...

PAUL (CONT'D)
Let's get you home.

ELLIE
Okay.

She throws up.

125 INT. MUNSKY HOUSE - PAUL'S BASEMENT ROOM - LATER 125

A slightly disheveled basement repurposed as a boy's room.

We can hear Ellie and Paul's voices coming from behind the closed bathroom door.

ELLIE (O.S.)
I'm so sorry.

PAUL (O.S.)
It's okay.

125 CONTINUED: 125

ELLIE (O.S.)
I think I'm done now.

PAUL (O.S.)
Okay.

ELLIE (O.S.)
No wait...

PAUL (O.S.)
Okay.

Beat.

ELLIE (O.S.)
I'm good.

PAUL (O.S.)
Okay.

Bathroom door opens.

Paul carries Ellie over his shoulder into the bedroom.

ELLIE
Are you taking me home now?

PAUL
Yeah.

ELLIE
Okay.

She passes out.

He lays her gently on the bed.

Sets her backpack against the bed... out spills SEVERAL SEALED LETTERS to various food critics around the state. Addressed in "his" writing.

Paul stares at the letters. Then at Ellie.

He settles in an armchair in the corner, awake, watching.

126 INT. MUNSKY HOUSE - PAUL'S BASEMENT ROOM - NEXT MORNING 126

A ray of SUNSHINE lands on a sleeping Ellie. A muffled BUZZING from her backpack. She stirs.

On the bed stand, a full glass of water and two aspirin.

126 CONTINUED: 126

She reaches for them.

From upstairs:

COLLEEN MUNSKY (O.S.)
He's at practice, but you can leave it in his room.

ASTER (O.S.)
It's just a silly thing I thought he'd like.

Ellie does a SPIT TAKE.

ON HER PHONE are FIVE UNREAD MESSAGES. The first: "Home early from Sacramento. Tomorrow?"

She falls out of bed in a frantic attempt to groom, clean, calm herself because ASTER FLORES IS ON HER WAY DOWN.

In her haste, she wakes Paul's laptop, which starts playing a dumb prank show called "TOO AWESOME TO DIE"

ELLIE
Ugh.

She can't get it to stop.

Above, a door opens. Colleen and Aster descend the stairs.

COLLEEN MUNSKY (O.S.)
...we went as far as Sekiu once, but never made it all the way to California. You're quite the world traveler!

Colleen and Aster enter, just as Ellie muffles Paul's laptop under a pillow.

COLLEEN MUNSKY (CONT'D)
Oh, it's Paul's Chinese friend! Didn't hear you come in.

ELLIE
Just dropping off books...

COLLEEN MUNSKY
Aster is also dropping off-

A LOUD GRINDING FROM UPSTAIRS.

126 CONTINUED: (2) 126

COLLEEN MUNSKY (CONT'D)
Tommy! Hands off the grinder!

Colleen hustles back upstairs.

Aster smiles, a bit guarded.

ASTER
Hi.

ELLIE
Hi.

ASTER
So you and Paul-

Paul's laptop wakes: "...stuff an electric eel UP HIS NOSE!"

ASTER (CONT'D)
Is that... "*Too Awesome to Die?*"

ELLIE
Yup. *I* was watching that.

From the laptop: "check out the electric snot! Woah! AWESOME!" Ellie puts another pillow on top.

ASTER
Are you two...?

ELLIE
Oh god no! No, no! He is totally one hundred percent into you!

ASTER
(surprised) You know about us?

ELLIE
Oh! Uh. He wanted to do some extra reading, so I lent him some books.

ASTER
He's doing extra reading?

ELLIE
For you.

ASTER
That's... sweet.

ELLIE
It is.

126 CONTINUED: (3) 126

It really is. Aster relaxes.

ASTER
(confessing) On our first date, I kept talking about books... I think I almost drove him away. God, I can be such a nervous idiot!

What? Ellie is dumbfounded.

ELLIE
You could never be an idiot. I mean *Paul* would never think that. He's *way* into you.

Aster takes this in, smiling.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
I should get back to the station.

She notices a SMALL CANVAS PRINT in Aster's hand.

ASTER
(self-conscious) Just something silly I made on my trip.

Ellie reaches for it. It's reminiscent of the mural they made. But clearly the stirrings of Aster's own voice.

ELLIE
I like this stroke off to the side. Lonely..... And hopeful.

Aster looks at her own painting.

ASTER
Yeah.

Ellie hands it back.

ELLIE
He'll love it.

She starts to go. Aster looks up from her painting.

ASTER
Can I come with?

ELLIE *
To the station? *

126 CONTINUED: (4) 126

ASTER *
I already lied to my dad about where I'd be. I have the day.

Off Ellie's uncertain expression...

ELLIE (O.S.)
Red, then Green. *Green*!

127 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - DAY 127

CLOSE ON the side of a train slowing... then starting to speed up... then jerking to a stop. Then finally pickup speed to WHIP BY, leaving... Aster on the platform, laughing, clearly having botched the signal lights.

ASTER
You get to do this *every day*?

ELLIE
Twice. 6:40am and 11:40PM weekdays. 12:10PM and 9:20PM weekends. Give or take an hour.

ASTER
That is AWESOME!

ELLIE
(wry) It's a real blast.

ASTER
It's so master-of-the-universe.

ELLIE
A teeny-tiny universe.

ASTER
At least you rule *something*.

Ellie takes the lights and ducks into the booth. Aster points at some ELECTRIC SIGNAL LIGHTS.

ASTER (CONT'D)
What about those?

ELLIE
My dad doesn't trust them.

Ellie finishes. Stares at Aster from the booth.

An awkward beat. What next?

127 CONTINUED: 127

ASTER
Want to get out of here?

Ellie glances up at the apartment window.

Aster smiles, winningly.

CUE ROADTRIP MUSIC.

128 EXT./INT. ASTER'S CAR/ROAD - LATER 128

A beat up hatchback hightails it out of town.

Aster cranks up the radio.

ELLIE
Where we going?

ASTER
My favorite secret place.

Ellie peers back out the window as Squahamish recedes in the distance. She closes her eyes. Feels the wind in her hair.

129 EXT. ABANDONED MOUNTAIN ROAD - LATER 129

The Fiesta slows to a stop at the end of a dirt road.

It is lush and foggy and deserted.

Ellie gets out of the car.

ELLIE
This is your favorite secret place?

ASTER
Almost.

Aster pulls out a duffel bag and starts down the trail.

130 EXT. SECRET HOT SPRINGS - LATER 130

The two girls push through some brush... into A BILLOW OF STEAM rising from a HOT SPRINGS SWIMMING HOLE. It's pristine.

ELLIE
Woah.

130 CONTINUED: 130

ASTER
Right?

Aster strips down and dives in. Re-emerges, glistening.

Ellie looks anywhere but Aster.

ELLIE
Are these deciduous trees?

ASTER
(amused) I wouldn't know.

Aster turns to give her privacy.

ASTER (CONT'D)
We didn't have trees like this in Sacramento. Everything's reversed. Things die off in summer, turn green in winter.

ELLIE
Is that where you grew up?

ASTER
Born there. Moved here. My life story.

She hears Ellie slip into the spring. Turns to find her still in a t-shirt. Glasses fogged. And...

ASTER (CONT'D)
Is that long underwear?

ELLIE
Yes.

Aster's mouth twitches. Then suddenly she hauls her body - naked - out of the spring.

ASTER
I almost forgot.

Ellie averts her eyes wildly.

ASTER (CONT'D)
There's no cell service here, so...

She digs a SMALL RADIO out of her duffel, switches it on.

A THROWBACK CLASSIC ROCK SONG pours out.

130 CONTINUED: (2) 130

ASTER (CONT'D)
It's like nothing can reach us here.

Nothing but Foghat. Ellie relaxes slightly into the water.

131 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - SAME TIME 131

Edwin looks out the window to see Paul peering up.

EDWIN
Ellie not here.

PAUL
This is for you.

Paul lifts up a sack of fresh pork. And Chinese spices.

Edwin lowers the spray hose.

132 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - LATER 132

Edwin shows Paul how to season the meat with five-spice powder. They work silently and companionably.

133 EXT. SECRET HOT SPRINGS - SAME TIME 133

The girls on opposite sides of the small spring. Aster is in her element. Ellie... less so.

ASTER
Catholic school was the worst.

ELLIE
The nuns?

ASTER
The girls. Like Lord of the Flies but with Lisa Frank.

ELLIE
Miss Piggy's head on a stick. *

ASTER
The "beast" reimagined as a sparkly unicorn. *

133 CONTINUED: 133

ELLIE
Instead of a naval officer, Taylor Swift's yacht saves the day.

Aster laughs, slows to tread water. Takes Ellie in.

ASTER
I don't think I've hung out with another girl and not talked about boys before.

ELLIE
Oh. Sorry.

ASTER
Don't be. It's nice.

Aster seems thoughtful.

ELLIE
(blurts out) Paul's cool.

A beat of disappointment. Then Aster shifts gears too.

ASTER
He's... confusing. When I'm with him, I feel... safe. He's a... sweet guy. Then he writes these things that feel... not safe.

ELLIE
Not safe...?

ASTER
They just make me wonder...

She trails off, a million unspoken thoughts.

ASTER (CONT'D)
I should marry Trig.

ELLIE
Oh!

ASTER
Should I?

Ellie doesn't have an answer.

133 CONTINUED: (2) 133

ASTER (CONT'D)
(sighs) God doesn't know either, if it's any consolation. Or He's not telling.

ELLIE
I don't believe in God.

ASTER
That must be so nice.

ELLIE
No. It's not. It's... lonely.

It's the most real thing she's ever said.

Aster hears it. Lets it sink in. *

ASTER
I wish I knew what I believed. I overheard Trig once talking to my dad about our future wedding. He * hasn't even asked me yet - he's just so *sure*. And maybe that's love? I've been asking God to give me a sign. If this is what love is, I'll accept it and be grateful. But if it's supposed to be something bigger, something more... And then Paul's letter appeared in my locker. And I've never felt so... understood.

She glances at Ellie, embarrassed.

ASTER (CONT'D)
Silly, right?

ELLIE
No. It's not silly.

A moment of real connection.

ASTER
You know what *is* silly?

Aster wades slowly toward Ellie... removes her glasses... tries to YANK her shirt off. They tussle. Shrieking. Laughing.

133 CONTINUED: (3) 133

ASTER (CONT'D)
Did you *layer*???

ELLIE
I am a Russian doll of clothing!

134 EXT. SECRET HOT SPRINGS - DAY 134

Heads together in the center of the hole, floating, staring into the sky. Both girls in puffed up t-shirts. Ellie more relaxed than we've ever seen her.

ELLIE
Gravity is matter's response to loneliness.

ASTER
Who said that?

ELLIE
...I don't know.

ASTER
Well then *you* said it.

Is this true? They float.

FROM THE RADIO: "If You Leave Me Now" by Chicago.

ELLIE
(exhaling) My mom loved this song.

They listen.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
She said every song, movie, story has a best part.

Beat.

ASTER
Was that the best part?

ELLIE
Do *you* think it's the best part?

Aster bites her lip. Listens more intently.

ASTER
Was that it?

134 CONTINUED: 134

ELLIE
You asking or saying?

Suddenly the swell of the bridge:

CHICAGO (FROM RADIO)
“A love like ours is love that’s hard to find. How could we let it slip away?”

ASTER
That’s it.

ELLIE
Yeah.

It is.

CHICAGO (FROM RADIO)
“...when tomorrow comes and we both regret/the things we said today. If you leave me now...”

They listen, floating.

The last bars of the song fade out.

Both stare into the sky, smiling. This moment is perfect.

135 OMITTED 135

136 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - DUSK 136

Ellie gets out of the car and starts toward the station.

ASTER
Hey!

She turns back.

ASTER (CONT’D)
Hope you find something good to believe in.

They share a smile. Aster drives off.

Ellie casts a nervous glance up at the apartment.

137 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER 137

Ellie peeks in.

Edwin, in his lounger, eating a sausage, watches a movie.

Everything seems weirdly fine.

EDWIN (IN MANDARIN)
Paul made a braised pork sausage. Pretty tasty. Yours is in the microwave.

Ellie pulls a covered plate out of the microwave.

EDWIN (IN MANDARIN) (CONT'D)
He asked you to call him later.

Ellie climbs up the ladder to her bedroom.

138 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - ELLIE'S ATTIC BEDROOM - LATER 138

Ellie lies on her bed, a dreamy smile on her face. She notices moonlight coming in her window.

139 EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE - SAME TIME 139

Close on a garbage can lid going on tight.

Paul wipes his hands on his apron.

ASTER
Hey.

Aster has been watching him.

PAUL
Oh. Hey!

ASTER
Do you believe in God?

PAUL
(confused) Of course.

ASTER
Yeah. Of course.

139 CONTINUED: 139

PAUL
I got your painting. It was pretty. *

Beat.

ASTER
Thanks.

Then suddenly she kisses him, as if to feel something. Startled, Paul kisses back.

140 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - ELLIE'S ATTIC BEDROOM - SAME TIME 140

From her high vantage point, Ellie sees the kiss. Draws the blinds. No longer dreamy.

Bumps her guitar case... which spills out onto her futon. The Grinnell application slides out. * *

She looks at it. Then at the picture of her mother. Sighs.

ELLIE
Not like I'll send it in. But...

Cracks open the application and starts filling it out. *

141 EXT. MUNSKY SAUSAGE SHOP - BACK ENTRANCE - SAME TIME 141

Aster and Paul finish their kiss. It wasn't bad but... both seem a little confused.

PAUL
Big game this week. Training.

ASTER
See you after it's over? *

PAUL
Yeah. Cool. *

Paul watches Aster drive off.

Looks over at Ellie's window.

The back door flings open.

141 CONTINUED: 141

TOMMY MUNSKY (O.S.)
Paulie! You marrying the garbage out there? Truck leaves for home in 5!

141 CONTINUED: (2) 141

With a last glance at Ellie's window, he heads in.

142 EXT. TOWN OF SQUAHAMISH - EARLY MORNING 142

Shots of the town, waking. Superimposed over the images:

DiegaRivera: Good luck tonight!

SmithCorona: Thx!

On a different part of the screen:

Ellie: "Good luck!" That was Aster. *

Paul: You'll be there tonite, right?

Ellie: Can't wait to see a buncha guys sniffing * each other's butts. *

And with that we cut to...

143 EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - FIELD/STANDS - NIGHT 143

A bunch of guys in a pile sniffing each other's butts. Out of this pile of young manhood emerges a roughed up Paul. He * scans the stands.... No Ellie. *

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Another blowout with the Squahamish Moose down by 49! Fourth down, their own ten yard line, less than a minute on the clock. Players are lining up for the punt...

Paul gets in position, still scanning the stands. Finally, up * at the very top: ELLIE appears. He brightens. Waves. *

Aster - seated closer - waves back. *

The ball is SNAPPED. Paul starts running... *

... behind him: the ball goes wildly over the punter's head. * A MAD SCRAMBLE as players shove and tackle each other from all sides. CHAOS. *

FROM THE STANDS: Ellie gestures wildly to Paul: *turn around!* * Paul waves back, oblivious. *

143 CONTINUED: 143

A player from his team grabs the ball, starts down the field... and is CLOBBERED from all sides. THE BALL FLIES OUT OF THIS MESS OF FLESH. *

Back to PAUL, finally registering Ellie's hand signals. He turns, puzzled. *

THE BALL HITS HIM IN THE FACE... and he CATCHES IT. *

A slomo-beat of everyone staring. AND THEN EVERYONE IS AFTER HIM. Paul starts to RUN... and RUN... *

143 CONTINUED: (2) 143

... until he makes it into the endzone.

TOUCHDOWN.

CROWD GOES WILD.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIFTEEN YEARS, THE MOOSE HAVE SCORED! SCORED! WHAT NEXT, SUN IN JUNE?

On the scoreboard, "00" is replaced with "06."

A cheer breaks out: "We're on the board! We're on the board!" Even Ellie is smiling.

Paul, carried by his teammates, is elated.

144 EXT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - NIGHT - LATER 144

Paul pushes past fans, searching for Ellie.

AT ANOTHER PART OF THE STADIUM

Aster searches for Paul.

BACK TO PAUL

Paul stops a random student.

PAUL
Have you seen Ellie Chu?

RANDOM STUDENT
Who?

Paul pushes on. *Where could she be?* And suddenly, he knows.

145 INT. FOOTBALL STADIUM - BASEMENT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 145

A bottle of YAKULT falls from a VENDING MACHINE.

PAUL (O.S.)
Hey.

Ellie turns, her arms full of Yakult.

ELLIE
All hail the pride of Squahamish!

145 CONTINUED: 145

PAUL
Thanks! Didn't have to get me a Yakult.

ELLIE
Oh. Yeah. Take one.

PAUL
I don't need a Yakult.

ELLIE
Good.

PAUL
I need to talk to you--

ELLIE
My hands are full. Could--?

Paul sighs, opens one of the Yakults. "Feeds" Ellie.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
So good.

PAUL
("pay attention") HEY.

ELLIE
What?

She has a Yakult mustache. Paul struggles to find the words. Then takes her by the shoulders... and LAYS ONE ON HER.

Ellie's eyes bug out. Yakults topple to the floor.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

PAUL
YOU DON'T WANT ME TO KISS YOU?

ELLIE
NO!

A lone Yakult rolls to a stop.

PAUL
(crushed) Why?

A gasp at the door: ASTER STANDS THERE, mouth agape.

145 CONTINUED: (2) 145

ELLIE
Aster! This is not...!

But she's gone.

Paul stares at the stricken look on Ellie's face. Light bulb.

PAUL
No...

ELLIE
Paul...

PAUL
You...

He starts to back away.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You... You're a...

He wants to pound the wall. He can't look at her.

PAUL (CONT'D)
(quietly) You're going to hell.

He leaves.

Leaving Ellie, standing in a pile of crumpled Yakult.

146 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT/CHU APARTMENT WINDOW - LATER 146

Ellie pulls her bike up.

TRIG (O.S.)
I'm onto you, Ellie Chu.

ELLIE
(to self)
This is a nightmare.

Trig pulls out of the shadows.

TRIG
I know why you're always hanging around. Popping up everywhere.

She's so tired. It's time to confess.

ELLIE
It was just supposed to be one let--

146 CONTINUED: 146

TRIG
You're in love with me.

What? Then, sighing: *

ELLIE
Yes, Trig. I'm in love with you.

TRIG
I get it.

He leans in to kiss her... and gets SMACKED in the face with a STREAM OF WATER.

EDWIN (O.S.) *
Get out! Get out!

TRIG
This is *cashmere fleece*!

He beats it back into the shadows. Sound of TRUCK tears off.

147 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - LATER 147

Ellie enters the apartment, passes her father, climbs up to her loft.

148 EXT. TOWN OF SQUAHAMISH - NIGHT 148

The lights go out on this murky night. It starts to rain.

ON BLACK:

"Hell *is* other people. - Sartre"

Cue "Long dark night of the soul" MONTAGE:

149 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD INTO TOWN - DAY 149

Ellie bikes through the rain.

Obnoxious bullies in truck approach... then pass, leaving her alone.

150 INT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - HALLWAY - ANOTHER MORNING 150

A BANNER UP HIGH WITH PAUL'S SMILING FACE: "PAUL MUNSKY! HE PUT US ON THE BOARD!" Boom down to the real Paul walking toward CAM surrounded by back-slappers. He is miserable.

151 EXT. SQUAHAMISH HIGH - PARKING LOT/TRIG TRUCK - NOON - ANOTHER DAY 151

Quaddies cheer on Trig as he drinks a Dr. Pepper without his hands. Aster picks at her lunch. She is miserable.

152 INT. MRS. G'S CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON - ANOTHER DAY 152

A concerned Mrs. G watches Ellie pass by, also miserable.

153 INT. MUNSKY HOUSE - KITCHEN - ANOTHER NIGHT 153

Paul at a computer as his brothers play SlapFight in the BG.

He types "homo" into a browser. Clicks on "How do you know if you are gay?"

COLLEEN MUNSKY
Paulie! Garbage duty.

PAUL
Got it, Ma.

Sleeps the computer, heads out.

The screen pops back on. His mom's eyebrows shoot up.

154 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - ANOTHER NIGHT 154

Edwin and Ellie in their usual La-Z-Boys eating dinner.

Laughter erupts from a CLASSIC COMEDY on screen.

Edwin shoots a worried glance at his silent daughter.

155 INT. SQUAHAMISH CATHOLIC CHURCH - CONFESSION BOOTH - DAY 155

Angle on Aster in the confession booth.

155 CONTINUED: 155

ASTER
Forgive me father for I have sinned. It's been 48 days since my last confession. I had feelings for someone who wasn't my boyfriend. I didn't tell you. Or God. Or my boyfriend. I kept it for myself. I was selfish. And maybe love is selfish. It's having this secret stashed in you, until one day it feels like someone else has that same secret and suddenly this thing you didn't even know you held feels full and amazing and real… But it turns out to be a lie. And you're left lonelier than ever. So I'll do whatever Hail Mary's you deem fit. But whatever punishment you give me, it can't be worse than this feeling. Because even now... he's the only one I want to talk to. And it's like he doesn't even exist.

Aster slips out of the booth.

Father Shanley, mournful, looks slowly to his other side... to reveal a hidden ELLIE, knees up, heartbroken.

156 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - ANOTHER DAY 156

A train whips by... with no one on the platform.

ON BLACK:

NEW SLIDE:
"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, etc, etc. - 1 Corinthians 13:4-8"

157 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - MORNING 157

Out of a patch of weeds, the first crocus.

158 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - MORNING 158

SLAM. 30 POUNDS OF GROUND PORK land on the kitchen counter.

Paul wipes his hands on his apron, over an ill-fitting suit.

158 CONTINUED: 158

PAUL
See you next month.

He starts to leave.

EDWIN
Paul?

PAUL
Sir?

Edwin hesitates.

EDWIN
Did you and Ellie... break up?

PAUL
We weren't... together.

EDWIN
She seems... sad.

Paul doesn't know what to say, starts to leave. Then turns back, knowing exactly what to say.

PAUL
You don't see her.

Edwin stares at him.

EDWIN
See... her?

PAUL
Who she is. Could be. *Her*.

Paul slumps against the wall.

Edwin is quiet.

EDWIN (IN MANDARIN)
When Ellie's Ma died, I lost my mind. I didn't move for days. When I finally "woke", I found Ellie in the booth, doing the switch. She looked up at me. Just 13. So serious. And I... smiled. After that, she took over. And I let her.

He smiles now, remembering.

158 CONTINUED: (2) 158

EDWIN (CONT'D)
It was a good way to know where she was every morning. Every night.

He looks at Paul, eyes soft. Now in English:

EDWIN (CONT'D)
Have you ever love someone so much, you don't want anything about her to change?

Off Paul's face absorbing this thought.

Sound of EASTER MASS BEING SUNG...

159 INT. SQUAHAMISH CATHOLIC CHURCH - CHAPEL - MORNING 159

Close on a LIT PASCHAL CANDLE.

Angle on the CONGREGATION singing.

Angle on FATHER SHANLEY, heavily guided by DEACON FLORES, presiding over the mass.

Angle on Ellie playing the organ.

Easter Sunday Mass finishes without a hitch.

Deacon Flores exhales.

And then as if awakening:

FATHER SHANLEY
"OUTSIDE ARE THE DOGS AND THE SORCERERS AND THE--"

Deacon Flores wrestles him back.

DEACON FLORES
And to close our Easter services, a few readings from the congregation...

IN THE CONGREGATION

Paul slides onto a pew next to his mother.

COLLEEN MUNSKY
You're late.

159 CONTINUED: 159

PAUL
Had to grind something.

She eyes him suspiciously.

FROM THE ORGAN BALCONY

Ellie peers out and locates Paul... then a somber Aster.

FROM THE PULPIT

DEACON FLORES
Our final reading today is from Trig Carson.

Trig stands in the audience, clears his throat.

TRIG
“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud...” Which is why I love this little lady.

He gestures to a startled Aster sitting one row behind.

TRIG (CONT’D)
And why she’ll make me a fantastic wife. Aster, will you?

Wave of approval ripples through the crowd.

Aster, frozen, gives the barest of nods.

The congregation bursts into applause.

ELLIE
NO!

Gasps. Every head turns back to the balcony.

ELLIE (CONT’D)
Uh. I uh...

So many eyes on her.

ELLIE (CONT’D)
I just wanted to say, uh... love isn’t...

Aster is staring at her, eyes narrowed.

159 CONTINUED: (2) 159

ELLIE (CONT'D)
...isn't uh...

DEACON FLORES
Thank you, Ellie. Everyone, let's-

PAUL
Love isn't pretending.

ANGLE ON PAUL STANDING.

Another collective gasp. *What is going on?*

PAUL (CONT'D)
I know because *I've* been pretending. Only for a few months. But it SUCKS.

ELLIE
Paul-

PAUL
And I've been thinking about how much it would suck to have to pretend to be - *not you* - your whole life.

He's careful not to look at Ellie. But he's speaking to her.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I always thought there was one way to love. But there's more. So many more than I knew. And I never want to be the guy who stops loving someone... for loving the way they want to love.

His voice has never been stronger. Ellie's eyes are full.

DEACON FLORES
Thank you, Paul, that was... odd. Now let's give Trig our-

ELLIE
I also have been pretending.

Again, gasps. This is getting exciting. The Deacon slumps.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
I've been uh, pretending-

159 CONTINUED: (3) 159

TRIG
I think I know where this is going. Ellie, I'm flattered. But you and I-

ELLIE
You know, Trig, I have been writing your papers for the last four years.

Startled gasps. More than a few guilty faces.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
And if you'll forgive me, I'm just gonna rewrite you one last time. Love isn't patient and kind and humble. Love is *messy* and *horrible* and *selfish* and...

She can feel Aster's confused gaze.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Bold.

A flicker of recognition on Aster's face.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
It's not finding your perfect half. It's the trying and reaching and *failing* - the effort you put in with no promise of success. Love is... being willing to ruin your good painting for a chance at a great one.

Ellie looks directly at Aster.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Is this really the boldest stroke you can make?

Silence.

ASTER
You.

ELLIE
Yeah.

Every breath is held as Aster walks slowly toward ELLIE. She stops in front of PAUL. Eyes still on Ellie - she SLAPS Paul.

As Aster leaves, the congregation breaks into MAYHEM.

159 CONTINUED: (4) 159

ANGLE ON DEACON FLORES AND A STRANGELY HAPPY FATHER SHANLEY

FATHER SHANLEY
Amen!

DEACON FLORES
Everyone please take your seats!

ANGLE ON TRIG

TRIG
Wait. I'm the *good* painting?

ANGLE ON PAUL AND HIS MOTHER

COLLEEN MUNSKY
Mommy wants you to know in case you are gay, Mommy still loves you. *

PAUL
I'm not gay, Ma.

COLLEEN MUNSKY
Thank god!

She hugs her son hard.

PAUL
I might want to change our sausage recipe, though.

COLLEEN MUNSKY
Are you insane?!

She WHACKS him with her handbag.

ANGLE ON MRS. G SURVEYING THE CHAOS HAPPILY

MRS. G.
Now *that's* some divine intervention.

ANGLE ON ELLIE AT THE DOOR

She catches Paul's eye. The two friends share a nod.

DIRECT HIT from his mom's handbag.

PAUL
Ow!

Ellie slips out, grinning.

160 INT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - CHU APARTMENT - LATER 160

Ellie enters the apartment.

Bags of freshly folded dumplings sit on the counter. Edwin has been hard at work.

She rinses her hands and joins her father.

ELLIE (IN MANDARIN)
This is a lot of dumplings.

EDWIN (IN MANDARIN)
It's six days. 18 meals. To Iowa.

Ellie stares at her dad, astonished.

EDWIN (CONT'D)
We didn't come to this country so you could be like me. We came here so you could be like your mother.

Ellie flushes. A lovely beat as father and daughter fold dumplings, neither looking at the other.

ELLIE (IN MANDARIN)
You don't mean "dead", right?

EDWIN (IN MANDARIN)
God, I hope not. *

161 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT - DAY 161

Outside, it's grey and moody. And beautiful.

ON BLACK:

New slide: "Love is messy and horrible and selfish... and bold. - Ellie Chu"

162 EXT. TEQULIA SAL Y LIMON/ROAD - A FEW MONTHS LATER - DAY 162

A sunny late August day.

A shift of WAITSTAFF exit, laughing, Aster amongst them. Stops short when she sees...

ELLIE, leaning against her bike, waiting.

162 CONTINUED: 162

Aster hesitates, waves her friends on.

She starts to walk. Ellie falls in next to her.

ELLIE
You haven't been to church.

ASTER
I've been busy.

ELLIE
Yeah?

ASTER
(beat) You need four portfolio pieces for art school, so...

ELLIE
Art school? That's great!

ASTER
Nothing's *great* yet, but we'll see. What's going on with you?

ELLIE
Well, I'm headed east to Grinnell. They took me late acceptance, so--

ASTER
Good for you, Ellie. Take care.

She starts to cross the street.

ELLIE
Aster. (beat) I'm sorry.

Aster slows to a stop, still not turning.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
It was just supposed to be one letter. But then writing you turned out to be the closest I've ever come to being... heard. (beat) I never meant to hurt you.

A flicker of pain crosses Aster's face. Then:

ASTER
Sometimes I wish... "you" existed.

ELLIE
I know. I'm sorry.

162 CONTINUED: (2) 162

A Bronx cheer arises from a distant sports bar. Then silence.

ASTER
Deep down I probably knew the truth. (beat) I mean you really didn't put enough emojis in his texts...

ELLIE
I *don't know what they mean*!

ASTER
A puppy or a sausage-

ELLIE
I should have sent you a *SAUSAGE EMOJI*???

ASTER
Fair point.

Truce. They smile at each other. Then, looking away:

ASTER (CONT'D)
For what it's worth, it's not like it *never* crossed my mind if things were different. Or I was different.

Beat. Then gently deadpan:

ELLIE
You could never be different.

Aster looks back sharply.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
(still deadpan) "Am I *sure* I'm different? How do I *know* I'm *sure*?"

ASTER
I can be *sure*!

ELLIE
"I mean, *what does God think*...?"

ASTER
Oh my god-!

ELLIE
Just on and on and-

162 CONTINUED: (3) 162

ASTER
You watch: in a couple years, I'M GONNA BE SO SURE.

ELLIE
GOOD LUCK WITH THAT.

They smile at each other. Ellie mounts her bike.

ASTER
Find something good in Iowa to believe in, heathen.

Just a flicker of something unspoken.

Ellie starts to ride off... then *to hell with it*. She drops her bike, strides back toward Aster... and KISSES HER.

Aster is startled. But starts to kiss back.

Ellie breaks the kiss.

ELLIE
See you in a couple years.

She gets on her bike and rides off.

Aster watches her go, breathless. Starts laughing.

163 EXT. SQUAHAMISH - ROAD OUT OF TOWN - SAME TIME 163

Ellie flies down a stretch of road on her bike, grinning, free. She lets out a WHOOP.

Behind her, the town fades into the distance.

ON BLACK:
New slide: "[emojis of pineapple, owl, caterpillar with glasses] - various sources"

Sound of a TRAIN WHISTLE.

164 EXT. SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT/TRAIN - MORNING 164

The train slows into the station with a LOUD EXHALE.

ENGINEER (O.S.)
We're stopping in... *Squahamish*?

164 CONTINUED: 164

Close on a LARGE RUCKSACK being lifted onto Ellie's back.

Paul hands her a COOLER stuffed with frozen dumplings.

From the ground floor window, a freshened up Edwin waves... then quickly looks away, doing "engineer" things.

PAUL
I'll keep him busy tasting new ketchups.

ELLIE
Nice writeup in the Town Crier.

PAUL
Munsky Sausages is gonna blow up! Might get to Iowa before you do...

ELLIE
Better get going then.

They smile at each other.

It's time to board.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Here.

She types something, presses send on her phone.

DING. Paul looks down at his. A tiny smile.

PAUL
The caterpillar does look smart.

ELLIE
Too smart to be standing on a platform, crying, like some wussy.

PAUL
I'm not crying!

ELLIE
(mouthing) Wussy... Wussy...

She's on the train.

Paul swallows.

165 EXT.SQUAHAMISH TRAIN DEPOT/INT. TRAIN - PASSENGER CAB - MOMENTS LATER 165

Ellie sinks into a seat next to the window.

Turns to look at Paul. She mouths one last “wussy.”

As the train starts up, a flash of trepidation crosses her face. Paul sees it.

And starts to JOG ALONGSIDE THE TRAIN.

ELLIE
Oh no... don’t... *no*...!

The train gathers speed... and so does Paul, grinning like a maniac.

And now Ellie is laughing. Hard.

ELLIE (CONT’D)
(under her breath) Moron.

The train pulls away, Paul running after it... a DISAPPEARING SPECK Ellie watches until it is gone.

When she turns back, there are tears in her eyes.

The ELDERLY LADY across the aisle smiles.

ELDERLY LADY
Is that your boyfriend?

ELLIE
No...

Then simply:

ELLIE (CONT’D)
He’s my friend.

Like it’s the best thing in the world.

She knows it. We know it. And as the train hurtles onward...

Somewhere, someone is listening to “If You Leave Me Now.”

FADE OUT.

THE END.